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THE RAS TAFARI BRETHREN: AN ANALYSIS OF  
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN A BLACK MILLENARIAN  
MOVEMENT

by



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A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Ras Tafari Brethren: An Analysis of Political Developments in a Black Millenarian Movement" submitted by Frances Anne Cruchley in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



## MAHOMED

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## ABSTRACT

This study has as its main theme the political implications of the activities of the Ras Tafari Brethren, a religious movement in Jamaica. Little work has been done on this group, yet its persistent opposition to the island's legal government over the past forty years would seem to indicate that it necessitates some attention, particularly in regard to its beliefs, goals and their effect on the larger Jamaican society.

On close examination of the Rastas' beliefs and practices we find that they are millennialists. In determining why the Brethren are such the politico-historical background of the island is considered and the impact of earlier religious groups assessed. Then the genesis and growth of Ras Tafariism is traced and its causal and functional development weighed.

Concepts such as status, social isolation and deprivation are discussed. The politicization of religious movements in general and the Brethren's political activities are contrasted so as to draw some conclusions on the movement's impact on the larger political scene in Jamaica.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## I. INTRODUCTION

On July 12th, 1966 the Jamaican government ordered the bulldozing of one of the capital city's worst slums.<sup>1</sup> Within a few short hours over 2,000 persons were left destitute and homeless. Many were also without any possessions whatsoever as they had been given no time to collect personal effects and few had had any foreknowledge of the government's decision and action. The great majority of these homeless people were members of a religious movement which believes that Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Ethiopia, is the living God.<sup>2</sup>

Before his Coronation as Ethiopian Emperor in November, 1930 Haile Selassie was known as Ras<sup>3</sup> Tafari. His followers take their name from this title and are variously known as the Ras Tafari Brethren, Ras Tafarians or Rastas. Their movement is usually termed Ras Tafarianism.

Ras Tafarianism, relatively speaking, is a new religious doctrine, having originated in the winter of

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<sup>1</sup>Daily Gleaner (Kingston, Jamaica), 13 July, 1966, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Smith, Roy Augier and Rex Nettleford, The Ras Tafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica (Mona: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University College of the West Indies, 1960), p. 22.

<sup>3</sup>'Ras' means Prince in Amharic, the main language of Ethiopia.



1930-1, after Haile Selassie's Coronation.<sup>4</sup> It is also a highly localized religion, being found only in Jamaica. Ras Tafarianism is distinctively an urban phenomenon. Although there are Rastas throughout the island, the greatest number have been centred in the sprawling slums of the capital, Kingston.<sup>5</sup> Of the known groups operating outside Kingston one is headquartered in St. Andrew,<sup>6</sup> while strong Rasta support is also found in Port Morant,<sup>7</sup> Montego Bay<sup>8</sup> and Red Hills, Spanish Town,<sup>9</sup> all urban centres dependent, for the most part, on the tourist trade as the major source of the population's income.

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<sup>4</sup>Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., pp. 8-11.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>6</sup>St. Andrew is now an extension of Kingston, the two areas grew into each other in the 1920's during a period of heavy urbanization. Kingston and urban St. Andrew have been known as the Corporate Area since 1923. The Gleaner Geography and History of Jamaica (rev. ed.; Kingston: Gleaner, 1967), p. 15 (Hereinafter referred to as Gleaner Geography.)

<sup>7</sup>Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>8</sup>Leonard E. Barrett, The Rastafarians: A Study of Messianic Cultism in Jamaica (Rio Piedras: Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico, 1968), p. 94.

<sup>9</sup>Hispanic-American Report, 1960, p. 387. (Hereinafter referred to as HAR.)





The purpose of this study is to examine the growth of Ras Tafarianism, the influence it has exerted on the political consciousness of black Jamaicans and the hostility it has engendered in the larger Jamaican society as reflected by the actions of the Jamaican government. In searching for a framework within which to assess the reasons for the development of the doctrine of Ras Tafarianism several sociological approaches were considered. Vittorio Lanternari's attempt to compare numerous religions developed by oppressed people<sup>10</sup> included a brief discussion on Ras Tafarianism. But Lanternari's messianic framework failed to draw the vital distinction between religions of the oppressed and millenarian religions, so necessary to a proper understanding of Ras Tafarianism in Jamaica. As a religious movement, the adherents of Ras Tafarianism believe that the living God, Haile Selassie, will in the very near future arrange for the repatriation of all of his followers to Ethiopia.<sup>11</sup> For this reason two of Yonina Talmon's studies on millenarism have been adopted as being theoretically more appropriate for the examination of this particular religious cult. These two beliefs in the

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<sup>10</sup>Vittorio Lanternari, The Religions of the Oppressed (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1963).

<sup>11</sup>Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 22.





imminence of repatriation, and its localization to Ethiopia would suggest that this is more than a messianic movement; it is a distinctively millenarian movement.

Yonina Talmon, writing on the concept of millenarism in the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences,<sup>12</sup> states that millennialism embodies all religious movements which anticipate "imminent, total, ultimate, this-worldly, collective salvation."<sup>13</sup> This succinct summary of Talmon's essential characteristics of a millenarian ideology is basically utilized as a framework within which to assess the Ras Tafari doctrine. It will be seen that Ras Tafariism does somewhat fit Talmon's conceptualization.

Having established that Ras Tafarians are millennialists, one has to postulate some reasons for such a choice. Are there any particular social or economic conditions which might encourage the development amongst such people of a millenarian approach to life? Talmon, both in her article quoted above and in an assessment of several books on millennial movements,<sup>14</sup> advances the

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<sup>12</sup>Yonina Talmon, "Millenarism," International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, X, 349.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 349.

<sup>14</sup>Yonina Talmon, "The Pursuit of the Millenium: The Relation Between Religious and Social Change," Archives europeennes de sociologie, III (1962), pp. 125-48.



theory that the multiple circumstances of feeling at once deprived, frustrated and isolated from society are sufficient cause for people to seek solace in such religious groups.<sup>15</sup>

Worsley's study of the millenarian cargo cults of Melanesia<sup>16</sup> emphasizes political powerlessness as the critical social condition which, if viewed as intolerable, would influence the powerless either to change their situation, or their definition of the situation. Worsley's theory further postulates that a millennial religious movement enhances the chances that such politically powerless groups will actively partake in influencing future events.<sup>17</sup> Worsley argues that any type of organization, by the very fact that it has banded together for some purpose, be it religious or social, cannot escape political involvement.<sup>18</sup> Even attempting to withdraw from society, according to him, is a political act because the initiators of such a movement demonstrate their complete lack of faith in the social order and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 136-40; Talmon, "Millenarism," 354-7.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Worsley, The Trumpet Shall Sound (2nd, augmented ed.; New York: Schocken, 1968).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 227 ff.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. xxxvi



those who support the system look upon such activity as hostility against their system.

Even the simple fact of organization as a cult, for quite religious purposes, carries with it the built-in inevitability of political action insofar as any organization, be it the most world-renouncing of sects; must stand in relationship to the world and ask of it something, even if it is only to be left alone, in peace to worship God . . . . A movement, that is, must always, objectively, be politico-religious, whatever its actors' willed purposes and conception of their movement and its ends.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, "Political action is . . . an immanent dimension or aspect of all social action, whether the ends of this action, as far as the actor is concerned, are the worship of God, earning one's bread, caring for one's children, etc."<sup>20</sup> This seems an attractive perspective from which to review recent events in Jamaica. The idea is that a millenarian movement is a "preparatory school for revolutionaries."<sup>21</sup>

Unlike Talmon who suggests that millenarian movements in modern societies are distinct from secular political movements in those societies,<sup>22</sup> Worsley is insistent that the politicization of millenarian groups

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. xxxvi.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. xxxvii.

<sup>21</sup>Talmon, "Pursuit of the Millenium," 143-4.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 144.





occurs in all societies.<sup>23</sup> Discovering which of these theories is more viable for the Rastas is one purpose of this study.

The paucity of any writings or results of field work<sup>24</sup> on Ras Tafarianism has severely limited a fuller development of these theories.

The study, first, briefly recounts the politico-historical background of Jamaica. It next deals with its population, paying attention to the folk-lore of the Maroons, and the appearance of Garveyism and the "back-to-Africa" movement. From this, it traces the emergence of the doctrine of Ras Tafarianism, discusses the central

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<sup>23</sup>Worsley, op. cit., pp. 227-242.

<sup>24</sup>The two major writings on the Ras Tafarians are the report of M.G. Smith, Roy Augier and Rex Nettleford, The Ras Tafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica (Mona: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University College of the West Indies, 1960); and Leonard E. Barrett, The Rastafarians: A Study in Messianic Cultism in Jamaica (Rio Piedras: Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico, 1968). The pioneering research which provided the basis for these two studies was done in the early 1950's by George E. Simpson and published in two articles; "Political Cultism in West Kingston, Jamaica," Social and Economic Studies, IV (1955), 133-49; and "The Ras Tafari Movement in Jamaica," Social Forces, XXXIV (1955), 167-71.

Of invaluable assistance in gaining an appreciation of the life-view and goals of the Rastas were the novels of H. Orlando Patterson, The Children of Sisyphus (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1965); and Roger Mais, Brother Man in The Three Novels of Roger Mais (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966).





beliefs and goals of the movement, and assesses its causal and functional development. Then follows a short narrative of the responses of minority groups in general to discrimination and deprivation. A discussion of the concept of status and its importance to the individual's identity is next introduced so as to clarify those psychological predispositions which encourage the growth of 'sub' and 'contra' cultures. This study then focuses on Ras Tafariism as a specific millenarian religious movement. In attempting to answer why a religious rather than a secular movement developed amongst these oppressed people, and why a millenarian rather than an escatological philosophy attracted them, the basic similarities and dissimilarities between 'religions of the disinherited' and millenarian movements is examined. Contemporaneous with this, the escalation of the political activities of several cult leaders resulting in violence is appraised within the context of the theoretical framework described above. It also attempts to analyze the movement's impact on the Jamaican political scene.



## II. A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH

For more than the first 150 odd years of its colonization Jamaica was a possession of Spain.<sup>1</sup> When British military men decide to invade the island in 1655 the total population numbered only about four thousand Spanish colonists, including their slaves. The invading forces, under Admiral Penn and General Venables, were comprised of over nine thousand well-armed soldiers and sailors.<sup>2</sup> The island had no defenses as it had never been valued by Spain, its main purpose being a breeding station for horses and cattle. The battle for possession was short and Jamaica fell.

British settlers began migrating to Jamaica immediately after the conquest and established an Assembly as early as 1663-4.<sup>3</sup> Nearly all the immigrants were associated with the development of sugar plantations.

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<sup>1</sup>Jamaica was discovered by Columbus in 1494, on his second voyage of discovery to the New World.

<sup>2</sup>Clinton Black, The Story of Jamaica (London: Collins, 1965), pp. 42-5.

S.A.G. Taylor, The Western Design (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1965), pp. 49-55.

<sup>3</sup>From the British occupation to the establishment of an elected Assembly and nominated Council, both subordinate to the Governor, in 1663, the island was ruled by: Commissioners, 1655-6; Court Martial, 1656-61; Governor and Council, 1661-3. Handbook of Jamaica, 1966 (Kingston: Government Printing Office, 1967), p. 73.



This planter class was generally poorly educated, disdained knowledge and contributed little towards the establishment of a cultural legacy.<sup>4</sup> It had one basic motivation; the accumulation and expansion of wealth through the possession of cane-fields and slaves.<sup>5</sup> In this society social distinctions were based on wealth alone. The landed proprietors were the apex; attorneys and other professionals followed; tradesmen, artisans and craftsmen were next. The estate-bookkeepers, whose main function was slave-driving, were often indentured or criminal labour from England. The clergy occupied the lowest rung of the white social ladder.<sup>6</sup> Among the slaves there were the gang-leaders and the members of the work-gangs.

The Church of England's acceptance of slavery and its tolerance of the inhumane treatment of the slaves negated any attempts by individual missionaries for

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<sup>4</sup>Gisela Eisner, Jamaica, 1830-1930; A Study in Economic Growth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), pp. 187-9.

<sup>5</sup>The slave ships of the British charter monopoly companies, which controlled the West African trade from 1655 on, dealt in slaves to Jamaica from 1662-1807. Jamaica was also used as a re-export depot to the Spanish Caribbean. H. Orlando Patterson, The Sociology of Slavery (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967), pp. 95, 113-5, 134.

<sup>6</sup>Eisner, op. cit., p. 189.





successful proselytization among the Africans. It was only later, with the influx of fundamental sects, that Christianity took root among these people. In 1783 the Native Baptist Church was founded by a black freedman, George Lewis. His African emphasis in his Baptist Church was very popular with the slaves.<sup>7</sup> The white and freed black Baptist missionaries of the late 1700's won a slave following but made no impact on the planters.

Two of Jamaica's great uprisings, that of the slaves in 1831,<sup>8</sup> and the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865<sup>9</sup> were felt by the white population to have been instigated by native Baptist Ministers. In both cases the black rebels were very harshly crushed. The whites apparently ruthless over reactions to any hint of a black uprising might be explained by their small numbers, as outlined in Table 1 which gives the percentage distribution of the population by colour from 1673-1960.

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<sup>7</sup> Lanternari, op. cit., p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> Facts and Documents Connected with the Late Insurrection in Jamaica and the Violations of Civil and Religious Liberty Arising out of It (London: Teape, 1832).

<sup>9</sup> Douglas Hall, Free Jamaica, 1838-1865; An Economic History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 237-63.

W.J. Gardner, A History of Jamaica (London: T.F. Unwin, 1909), pp. 471-88.





Table 1

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Percentage Distribution of the Jamaican Population by Race <sup>a</sup>					
<u>Year</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Coloured</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Asian<sup>b</sup></u>	<u>Total in 000's</u>
1673	-55-		45		17.2
1775	-95-		6		
1793	-90-		10		291.4
1844	77.7	18.1	4.2		377.4
1871	77.6	19.8	2.6		506.2
1911	75.8	19.6	1.9	2.7	831.4
1943	78.1	17.5	1.1	3.3	1,237.1
1960	76.8	14.6	0.9	7.7	1,609.8

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<sup>a</sup>Wendell Bell, Jamaican Leaders; Political Attitudes in a New Nation, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), p. 8.

<sup>b</sup>Includes Chinese and East Indians as well as Afro-Chinese and Afro-East Indian, sometimes classed as coloureds.

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There were two explanations for the sparcity of the whites in the colonies. First, there were never more than a few thousand white migrants, and these usually stayed only until their fortunes were made. The wealth from Jamaica's sugar was returned to families in England where it was invested in estates and luxury items. Secondly, nearly all the white immigrants were males. The unpleasant climate, the deficiency of proper housing, shops and theatres, and the impossibility of enjoying



cultured companionship weighed heavily against the gentle ladies of England taking up residence on the island.

The ranks of the blacks were increased both through the slave trade and through births. Young and healthy females were considered an excellent investment. When the slave trade was abolished in 1807 over 700,000 blacks had been imported to Jamaica.<sup>10</sup> A third racial group, called coloureds or browns, resulted from the cohabitation of white men and black slave women. In 1830 the coloureds were made the legal equals of island-born whites, who had been regarded as citizens of England since a Royal Proclamation of 1662.<sup>11</sup> Up until that time only those born in wedlock had enjoyed any specific privileges. The great majority, born out of wedlock, were severely restricted in what they could own and do;<sup>12</sup> the poorest among these even had to obtain and carry at all times certificates of freedom to distinguish them from slaves.<sup>13</sup> By 1820 the coloureds were Jamaica's second class both in terms of wealth (after the whites) and numbers (after the blacks).

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<sup>10</sup>James A. Mau, Social Change and Images of the Future (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1963), p. 15.

<sup>11</sup>Gleaner Geography, p. 41.

<sup>12</sup>Eric Williams, From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969 (London: Andre Deutsch, 1970), pp. 187-9.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 189.



The Jamaican blacks themselves were completely emancipated in 1838 although a general lobby for emancipation throughout the British colonies had been strong in England as early as the 1820's; England and Scotland had abolished slavery in 1772 and 1778.<sup>14</sup> Emancipation brought the mass of poor blacks little more than the right to choose their masters. They did not have the vote and seemed powerless to influence any social reforms. The Morant Bay Rebellion, in retrospect a demand for social reform in Jamaica, so terrified the whites that they forfeited their representative government and became a Crown Colony in 1866.<sup>15</sup>

An uneasy calm prevailed over the island from 1866 until the 1930's.<sup>16</sup> The world-wide economic depression of 1929-30 hit Jamaica as severely as elsewhere but the lack of any welfare programmes, or of any trade union organizational activity made it extremely difficult for workers to demand or receive any income whatsoever. Jamaica has always been doubly burdened with a large

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<sup>14</sup>Wendell Bell, Jamaican Leaders; Political Attitudes in a New Nation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), p. 42.

<sup>15</sup>Hall, op. cit., p. 263.

<sup>16</sup>Eisner, op. cit., pp. 221-8.





population, a small cultivable land area and a limited job market.<sup>17</sup> Driven off of the unproductive farms in the 1920's and with no jobs available in the island's small towns, the bulk of the unemployed flocked to the capital city, Kingston, which now contains over 20% of the island's population.<sup>18</sup>

The effects of the Depression were evidenced in the rise of three Kingston-based movements; the labor movement<sup>19</sup> under the leadership of Alexander Bustamante; the formation of the island's first political party, the People's National Party (PNP), based on the goals of self-government, universal suffrage and public ownership of resources, with Norman Manley as its leader; and the emergence of the cult of Ras Tafarianism. Bustamante's trade union, the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU) soon developed a political arm, the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP); and Manley's party a labour wing, the Trades Union Congress (TUC), later the National Worker's Union (NWU). Together these two organizations and their leaders have almost completely dominated the Jamaican political scene,

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<sup>17</sup>Ransford Palmer, The Jamaican Economy (New York: Praeger, 1968), p. 2.

<sup>18</sup>O.W. Phelps, "The Rise of the Labour Movement in Jamaica," Social and Economic Studies, IX (1960), 424.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 417-68.





usually with Bustamante in power and Manley in opposition. Although both groups promised to look after the poor Jamaican and give him a brighter future, they have become over the years basically middle-class parties<sup>20</sup> and have concentrated their energies on industrial development.

The poor black has found the solace he needs elsewhere. One source of such comfort is the predominantly non-political Ras Tafari movement. The appearance of Samuel Brown as an Independent both in the Kingston Corporate Area election of 1961,<sup>21</sup> and the National Election of 1962,<sup>22</sup> marked the emergence of a Ras Tafari as a political personality. Sam Brown's aim was to win power for the blacks through political office. His platform was based on his "Twenty-One Points" referred to as The Foundations of the Ras Tafari Movement (see Appendix 1).

Sam Brown preached that white and brown supremacy in the social and economic life of Jamaica must be overcome.

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<sup>20</sup>There are several good analyses of Jamaican political parties: C.P. Bradley, "Mass Parties in Jamaica, Organization and Structure," Social and Economic Studies, IX (1960), 375-416; Colin Hughes, "Adult Suffrage in Jamaica," Parliamentary Affairs, III (1955), 344-52; and K.W.J. Post, "The Politics of Protest in Jamaica, 1938: Some Problems of Analysis and Conceptualization," Social and Economic Studies, XVIII (1969), 374-90.

<sup>21</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>22</sup>Daily Gleaner, 24 August, 1966, p. 12.



This could be done only by blacks, through their 'vanguard' composed of political activists who would strive both for repatriation to Africa and for power for their people in Jamaica. Because neither of the two leading political parties would adopt this cause, Sam Brown set out to do it himself. He lost both elections, never polling more than one hundred votes in either. This seemed strange as he ran in West Kingston, a slum of over 100,000 blacks;<sup>23</sup> but few of these Dungleites<sup>24</sup> had been registered to vote. It would appear that the meagreness of eligible voters and the political inertia of most Rastas were responsible for this defeat. No other Ras Tafari has since sought elected office.

There have, however, been two black movements which have had a lasting influence on black perspectives in the evolution of Jamaican history.

#### THE MAROONS

The Maroons<sup>25</sup> are legendary for their courageous

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<sup>23</sup>Mau, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>24</sup>Dungleites are inhabitants of the Kingston Dungle, a Jamaicanism from the words "dung" and "hill"; a most succinct description of the West Kingston slums to which it refers. Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>25</sup>"Maroon" is the English term for "cimarrones", the "wild ones" - freed Spanish slaves who aided their former masters in their struggle against the British invasion of Jamaica. The following brief Maroon history is based on W. Adolphe Roberts, Jamaica, The Portrait of an Island (New York: Coward-McCann, 1955), pp. 61-7.



opposition to the British conquest of Jamaica in 1655. Cunning and skillful precursors of guerrilla bands operating all over the globe today, these freed Spanish slaves forced the British to sue for peace in 1738. As a result of the peace terms the Maroons and their descendants were declared in perpetuity to be "in a perfect state of freedom and liberty."<sup>26</sup> They received land, hunting rights and complete autonomy to govern themselves through their own elected chiefs. The only restriction imposed was that they could not pass the death sentence in their court; cases involving the death sentence were resolved by British law. Further, the Maroons promised to bar the entry of fugitive slaves into their communities, to pursue and capture them, and to be at the Governor's command in the event of an internal or external threat to the island's security.

Even though they served a white master, the Maroons have been eulogized as Jamaica's first black freedom fighters. Blackness held no significance for them in their attitude towards the plantation slaves. Liberty was personal to the Maroons; they did not try to extend it to others. Their only protest against Jamaican authority was a brief war in 1795-6 by a few hundred,

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 65.





out of approximately four thousand, who challenged the jailing of two of their tribesmen on charges of theft. This pathetic resistance was quickly defeated and with their families the insurgents were exiled to Nova Scotia.<sup>27</sup>

Today the Maroons still enjoy their autonomy in their village of Accompong, a tourist mecca. There are no unique political or cultural signs to suggest that Accompong is in any way different from other Jamaican towns. The people look, dress and speak as do all other rural, black Jamaicans. They possess no written history or archives. Their only distinguishing characteristics are that they pay no taxes, have their own magistrate's court, and elect a chief.<sup>28</sup>

It is important at this point to emphasize that in attempting to understand the beliefs of culturally deprived people "Statements believed to be true are often sociologically more important than those which are true."<sup>29</sup> To many lower-class, black Jamaicans the Maroons are seen as courageous freedom-fighters and not as British-paid bounty-hunters. The autonomous Maroon community of Accompong

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<sup>27</sup> Although the majority of those who were exiled either died in the Nova Scotia winter or journeyed to Sierra Leone, many remained as the ancestors of Nova Scotia's large black community. Roberts, op. cit., pp. 80-1.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 195-8.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 8.





is the visual proof of successful black resistance to white authority.<sup>30</sup> The Maroons as romantic folk-heroes have exercised considerable influence on some Jamaican religious cults.<sup>31</sup> Blacks often claim Maroon ancestry as a sign of distinguished lineage.<sup>32</sup> Many insist that a slave leader, Tacky, was a Maroon although all available evidence confirms that he was a chief of the fierce-fighting African Cromantyns.<sup>33</sup> During Tacky's Rebellion of 1760, the most serious slave revolt on the island, 60 whites and 300 blacks were killed. The only role played by the Maroons was in successfully quelling the rebellion after a month of hillside resistance by Tacky and his followers.

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<sup>30</sup>In June, 1960 a group of Ras Tafarians, called the "United Rasses of Jamaica", petitioned the Minister of Home Affairs for the establishment of an autonomous Rasta state, modelled on Accompong. The Government dismissed the request. George E. Simpson, "The Ras Tafari Movement in Jamaica in its Millennial Aspect," in Millennial Dreams in Action, ed. by Sylvia L. Thrupp (The Hague: Mouton, 1962), pp. 161-2.

<sup>31</sup>Maroon influences in Jamaican revivalist religions are discussed in Joseph G. Moore, The Religion of Jamaican Negroes (Evanston: University of Illinois, 1953), pp. 65-7, 182.

<sup>32</sup>One of the first points made by Amy Jacques Garvey in her book on her late husband is that his father passed on to him Maroon blood. Amy J. Garvey, Garvey and Garveyism (Kingston: By the Author, 1963), p. 3.

<sup>33</sup>The information on Tacky and the Rebellion of 1760 is from Roberts, op. cit., pp. 70-3.



Nevertheless, the Maroons, both through their long connection with the island and their continued existence as an autonomous people, have provided a pseudo-royal ancestry to enrich local black folklore.

#### MARCUS GARVEY AND GARVEYISM

The real impetus to the twentieth century social awakening of black people, not only in Jamaica but throughout the world, has been the philosophy of Marcus Garvey. Garvey's objective was to rebuild the black spirit: "Black men are not going to cringe before anyone but God,"<sup>34</sup> and "Now we [blacks] have started to speak, and I am only the forerunner of an awakened Africa that will not go back to sleep."<sup>35</sup>

Born in rural Jamaica in 1887 Garvey<sup>36</sup> went to Kingston as a boy of sixteen. After some early strike-organizing and labour oratory in Jamaica he travelled to Costa Rica and Panama where he continued his Jamaican efforts to found a newspaper of protest. These two Central American ventures were similarly unsuccessful. From Panama Garvey journeyed to London where he became

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<sup>34</sup>Edmund D. Cronon, Black Moses (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1955), p. 149.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 149-50.

<sup>36</sup>What follows on Garvey can be found in Cronon, op. cit., pp. 3-20.



interested in Africa and the problems of colonial administration, as well as becoming well informed of the difficulties endured by the black people in the United States. Returning to Jamaica in 1914 Garvey described his life-long aspiration in vivid terms: "My brain was afire in the hopes of uniting all the Negro peoples of the world into one great body to establish a country and a government absolutely their own."<sup>37</sup>

Garvey thereupon founded the Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association (UNIA) and African Communities League to achieve this goal. Although the ultimate aim was race redemption, "Africa for the Africans - At Home and Abroad!", the immediate goal was social and economic improvement for Jamaican blacks. Garvey's campaign received influential white Jamaican support but the coloureds were openly hostile to the scheme. The greatest tragedy of all was that the island's blacks were seemingly completely indifferent.<sup>38</sup>

However, accustomed to the messianism of a Bedward,<sup>39</sup> the spiritually-oriented, lower-class, black Jamaican was not going to accept the doctrine of thrift, hard work and

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>39</sup>Bedward's career is discussed in Barrett, op. cit., pp. 55-6. On failing to fly to Heaven on the appointed day (31 December, 1920), Bedward was committed to a lunatic asylum.





perseverance preached by Garvey.<sup>40</sup> Bedward, by claiming himself to be Jesus Christ in the form of a black man, had attracted a large following through his promise to inaugurate the millenium. He prophesied the day of white destruction and black redemption and regeneration. Garvey, on the other hand, never nurtured daydreams by promising that ships would miraculously appear to transport the blacks back to Africa. Rather, he established a steamship line,<sup>41</sup> the Black Star Line, so that black people would be able, through their own labour, to purchase passage to Africa. Garvey also preached that not all blacks would be welcome in Africa. People would have to work in Africa too; it would not be Paradise. Garvey foresaw today's demand by independent African states for only skilled immigrants.<sup>42</sup>

From March, 1916 to December, 1927 Garvey conducted the affairs of the UNIA from the United States. Garvey and his ideas had been warmly received in America and it was there that the UNIA became world-famous, with a membership of several millions. It was there too that the Black Star Line was begun. Unfortunately, the steamship line

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<sup>40</sup>Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>41</sup>Cronon, op. cit., pp. 50-2.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 185.





was administered by colleagues of Garvey who were less than scrupulously honest. As a result of a United States government investigation, Garvey was charged and convicted, in 1923, of using the mails to defraud in the selling of Black Star Line stock.<sup>43</sup>

Deported from America, it was a broken Garvey who returned to Jamaica in late 1927. The UNIA never regained its international prestige. Garvey himself lost control to American leaders. He remained in Jamaica until 1935. Aside from serving a term on the Council of the Kingston-St. Andrew Corporation he failed as a politician, being unsuccessful in his attempt to organize a political party, the Jamaican People's Party, in 1929.<sup>44</sup> In 1940 he died in England, having resided there for five years.

Even to-day Garvey is considered to be an extremely ambiguous personality, called saintly crusader by some,<sup>45</sup> devil by others.<sup>46</sup> The destruction of the UNIA and Garvey's

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 112-8.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>45</sup>"This Negro genius combines in his person the wisdom of a Solomon; the eloquence of a Demosthenes; the courage of a Cromwell; the grit and determination of a Robert Bruce; the iron will of a Bismar[c]k; the dauntlessness of a Toussaint L'O[u]verture and the cunning of a Napoleon Bonaparte." Quoted in Cronon, op. cit., p. 208.

<sup>46</sup>Others have denounced him as a "fabulous con man," and "hardly more than a strident demagogue, with inflated ambitions and a swaggering attitude." Quoted in Cronon, op. cit., p. 207.



personal incapacities and defeats, although significant, have not prevented him becoming an influential figure over the years. What has remained of consequence is his philosophy, rather than any tangible political achievements.

Garveyism invented and constantly reinforced black race pride, now popularized in the slogan, "Black is beautiful." Garvey gave his followers a black God and a white Satan in his African Orthodox Church.<sup>47</sup> He preached black racial superiority and discouraged integration. He supported the policies of the Ku Klux Klan in America, seeking in return their financial support for his back to Africa campaign. Garvey was convinced that unless the black man built his own civilization, he would remain the white man's victim. The UNIA is of little consequence in America today, but the Black Muslims have adopted much of Garveyism and have, since their establishment in the 1930's, consistently pushed for the creation of a black state within the territory of the United States.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Cronon, op. cit., pp. 178, 180.

<sup>48</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 182. In 1928 the Sixth World Congress of the Communist Internationale (CI) adopted a program of racial separation; "Self-Determination for Negroes in the Black Belt." The CI was aware that Garvey's UNIA was the only successful movement among Southern U.S. blacks and that Garvey stressed racial division. It was not until 1959 at the 17th National Convention of the CPUSA that this stand was repudiated and full racial



Garveyism, in the form of the UNIA, is also of little consequence in Jamaica today. Its virtual impotence in the 1930's resulted in the more educated members joining Manley's People's National Party, after its formation in 1938. The lower-class majority, however, transferred its UNIA allegiance to the then recently established doctrine of the Ras Tafari Brethren.<sup>49</sup>

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integration adopted as party policy. Wilson Record, Race and Radicalism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), pp. 55, 220.

<sup>49</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 3.





### III. ONE AIM! ONE GOD! ONE DESTINY!

--- motto of the Ras Tafari Brethren<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned in the Introduction very little research has been undertaken on the genesis and development of this politico-religious movement. Nonetheless Ras Tafariism has been far from insignificant in influencing politics in Jamaica. Largely overlooked in the thirties, forties and fifties, the cult gained international news coverage with its violent activities in the sixties. Because of its violence in recent years, and because of the support, sympathy and admiration that Ras Tafariism receives from Jamaica's poor blacks, the movement must be recognized as a potential political force on the island today.

The most fundamental tenet of Ras Tafariism is that Haile Selassie is the living God. Ras Tafarians use the Christian Bible as a book of holy allegory. Marcus Garvey is recognized in the role of John the Baptist, the precursor of Jesus Christ, God of the Christians. Rastas believe that Garvey was sent "to cut and clear"<sup>2</sup> in

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<sup>1</sup>This motto, along with "Africa for the Africans - At Home and Abroad", was adopted from Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association. Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>"To cut and clear" is an expression peculiar to Jamaican religious cults and means to remove evil spirits through rituals, in preparation for the religious experience, usually a form of spirit possession. George E. Simpson, "The Ras Tafari Movement in Jamaica: A Study of Race and Class Conflict," Social Forces, XXXIV (1955), 167.





preparation for the ascendancy of the living God to the throne of Solomon and Sheba.<sup>3</sup> This throne is the throne of Abyssinia, whose present Emperor, Haile Selassie, was known as Ras Tafari before his coronation in November, 1930 as Emperor of Ethiopia, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and the conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah. Garvey is believed to have told the blacks in the 1920's to "Look to Africa when a black king shall be crowned, for the day of deliverance is near."<sup>4</sup>

Between 1930-1 several Jamaican began to preach the doctrine of Ras Tafari as God.<sup>5</sup> Leonard P. Howell is

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<sup>3</sup>Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>Revelation 5, ii, v, is sufficient for the Rastas to confirm that Haile Selassie is the king that Garvey prophesied: "And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the book and to loose the seals thereof? . . . And one of the elders saith unto me, 'weep not; behold, the Lion of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book and to loose the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.'" Revelation 19, xix, xx, was fulfilled first with Ethiopia's occupation by the Italians and then its liberation in 1941: "And I saw the Beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war on him that sat on the horse, against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had the mark of the Beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone."

<sup>5</sup>A concise resume of the first apostles of Ras Tafarianism is given in Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., pp. 9-10.



generally regarded as the first and most significant. Howell had fought with the British forces against the Ashanti King in a war in 1896 and was credited with a knowledge of African languages and history. His base of operation was Kingston. Other early evangelists were Joseph Hibbert, who carried the doctrine to St. Andrew; and H. Archibald Dunkley, who modified the doctrine to suggest that the Emperor was only the Son of the living God. Soon many others were preaching the version of Howell and Hibbert.

In 1934 a group of Garveyites operating from the Kingston Dungle were converted to Ras Tafarianism by Howell's assistant, Robert Hinds and the doctrine established its firmest hold there. The Dungle Garveyites had concentrated their efforts on bettering the immediate poverty of their people.<sup>6</sup> Even after their conversion to Ras Tafarianism these men continued to emphasize the need for social reform in Jamaica.

Howell was the most popular Ras Tafarian preacher, enjoying two followings; one in Kingston, the other in Port Morant, long one of the island's most depressed areas. Some feared that the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion would be reenacted in 1934 when Howell and Hinds were arrested on

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 10.



charges of sedition at Port Morant.<sup>7</sup> The two were selling shilling postcard pictures of the Emperor Haile Selassie as the only passport requirement to Ethiopia. At the same time they encouraged those assembled to oppose both colonial British and local Jamaican authorities. During Howell's two years in jail his followers suffered police harrassment but remained loyal. Released in 1936 he disappeared from public view for some time but re-emerged as leader of the Ethiopian Salvation Society, an organization of considerable wealth allegedly obtained from anonymous American sources.<sup>8</sup> With this money Howell bought a large estate, called Pinnacle, in the parish of St. Catherine.

Pinnacle became a large commune which, at its height, housed about sixteen hundred followers. It was known throughout the area for the violence of its members, especially after ganja-smoking (marijuana) parties. Many Ras Tafarians believe ganja to be the biblical herb in Genesis, brought back to Noah in the Ark by the dove, as a sign that the floodwaters had receded from the earth and that all was well.<sup>9</sup> The Rastas consider it a religious

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<sup>7</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>9</sup>Genesis 8: xi. "And the dove came unto him in the evening; and lo, in her mouth was an olive [i.e. ganja] leaf pluckt off."





obligation to smoke this drug. Ras Tafarians do not drink. They resent the oppressive Jamaican laws against the cultivation and smoking of ganja; insisting that ganja-smoking is no more harmful to an individual than drinking. They argue that it is less harmful, and interpret the very strictly enforced ganja laws as discriminatory against them.<sup>10</sup>

In 1941 the police raided Pinnacle. Many of the Brethren were charged with growing or possessing ganja and Howell was convicted of assault. He was accused of violently beating non-Ras Tafarians who had attempted to reclaim property confiscated by their predatory neighbours.<sup>11</sup> Released in 1943, Howell returned to Pinnacle and lived in the style of the God he believed himself to be. His followers worked as his estate slaves.

From their beginnings it had been common for many Rastas to wear beards and not to cut their hair. The

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<sup>10</sup>In 1961 the Dangerous Drug Law was amended to allow for the prosecution of drug offenders in the lower courts. At the same time the penalties for drug offences were increased. Taken together the government's action to facilitate prompt prosecution for drug offences, and its legislation to increase penalties emphasized its determination to deal firmly with the ganja problem. Great Britain. Colonial Office. Annual Report on Jamaica, 1961 (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1961), p. 72.

<sup>11</sup>At Pinnacle Howell claimed that he was Haile Selassie (God) and owned all the world's goods. He showed no hesitation in asserting his self-given rights of possession over the property of others. Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 12.





scriptures are quoted to substantiate the claim of bearded Rastas that they alone are true to God's biblical directives.<sup>12</sup> A few months after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the Jamaica Times published a piece of Italian propaganda aimed both at justifying the Italian invasion and turning world public opinion against black Africans.<sup>13</sup> The Italians claimed that a secret black society, the Nyiabingi Order, desired the destruction of the white man and was preparing an army of 20,000,000 for this purpose. Haile Selassie was mentioned as the society's leader. Howell, long an advocate of racial violence,<sup>14</sup> had been quick to capitalize on this article by encouraging the development of a Nyiabingi Order in Jamaica. Local Nyiamen were called 'Locksmen' or 'Dreadlocks' because they greased and plaited their long, uncut locks in the fashion of the warriors of Africa's Somali, Masai and other tribes.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Numbers 6: i, ii, vi. "And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying, 'Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, when either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow the vow of a Nazarite to separate themselves unto the Lord . . . all the days of the vow of the separation there shall no razor come upon his head, until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the Lord, and shall let the locks of his hair grow."

<sup>13</sup>The article was originally published in the Jamaica Times, 7 December, 1935; and was reprinted in Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., pp. 43-7. It appears here as Appendix II.

<sup>14</sup>Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 12.



The Locksmen were verbally very violent but, since most of them remained at Pinnacle with Howell they were virtually unknown in the rest of the island.

After Pinnacle's destruction in a 1954 police drug raid many Locksmen moved into the Kingston Dungle. In the fifties the Dungle became the headquarters for nearly all the groups of Rastas in Jamaica. There are only two beliefs commonly held by these groups. The first, previously mentioned, is that Haile Selassie is the living God. The second shared article of faith is that black salvation, whether for the few or the many, can come only through repatriation to Africa.<sup>16</sup> They claim that Jamaica is hell, a place where blacks are only slaves, whereas Ethiopia is heaven. Ethiopia does not just refer to the boundaries of that nation alone but, to the Brethren, it commonly means Africa - all of it. Some even speak of repatriation to Africa, the capital of which is Ethiopia. It is not really that significant which name is chosen, it seems that the importance lies in the belief itself.

#### MILLENARIAN ASPECTS OF RAS TAFARIANISM

The discussion on Ras Tafarianism reveals that it has many of the characteristics attributed to millenarian movements by Talmon in her general discussion of

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 22.



millenarianism.<sup>17</sup> Before examining these characteristics, it would be well to point out that "millennial" and "chiliastic" refer, as does "millenarian" to the same idea - the 1000 year reign of the Judeo-Christian Messiah. Today, however, these terms characterize any religious movements that expect "imminent, total ultimate, this-worldly, collective salvation."<sup>18</sup>

It has been noted that the Ras Tafari Brethren look forward to Ethiopian repatriation as the greatest of all of God's actions. Domicile in Ethiopia is Heaven and, as such, it is a place of perfection where no harm can come to anyone. Repatriation, moreover, is for all time; there will never be a return to the days of slavery and degradation. For the Brethren history develops only linearly, leading to the final future of repatriation;<sup>19</sup> the ultimate and irrevocable goal.

While the imminence of the millenium is considered to be central to most millenarian movements, Worsley's typology of activist and passivist movements is important here.<sup>20</sup> Worsley defines as activist movements only those

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<sup>17</sup>Yonina Talmon, "Millenarism," 349-62.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 351.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 352.

<sup>20</sup>Worsley, op. cit., p. 12.





which expect the day of salvation to arrive soon and thus actively prepare for it. Passivist movements do not expect the millenium in their day and members die confor<sup>t</sup>ed by the belief in an eventual ressurection of all the elect. There seems to be a correlation between the degree of millenarian imminence and a movement's position on Worsley's activity-passivity continuum; those which feverishly anticipate the impending millenium often define the follower's role actively.<sup>21</sup>

Talmon generalizes that millenarian movements believe both in the this-worldliness and the imminence of salvation, which seems to be the case with the Ras Tafarians. Nonetheless, Worsley's passivist millennialism should not be overlooked. In the event that the "imminent" day of repatriation is postponed or fails to materialize the sect's adherents will either lose faith or push the date for the millenium into the more remote future. Most of the Rastas are still comparatively young and founding first-generation believers.<sup>22</sup> In 1960 many of these individuals believed at the time that repatriation would come then.<sup>23</sup> With the advent not coming about the prophecy

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<sup>21</sup>Talmon, "Pursuit of the Millenium," 132.

<sup>22</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>23</sup>Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 8.



was extended to take in the whole decade of the sixties.<sup>24</sup> Now the 1960's have passed and repatriation still seems a dream.

The basic tenet, that Haile Selassie is the living God and will never die, has recently been modified. The Emperor has become the second person of a Trinity: Creator; himself; and the "Breath within the Temple."<sup>25</sup> Should the Emperor die before implementing repatriation,<sup>26</sup> the two myths, of his immortality, and that he alone has the power to bring about the millenium, would still be saved. This recent and hardly recognized theological reinterpretation seems to be central in the transformation of the movement from one with an activist to one with a passivist view of the imminence of the millenium. The belief that the millenium is this-worldly, however, has remained with the Brethren. Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa is referred to as Zion.<sup>27</sup>

The collective orientation of Ras Tafarianism is

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>25</sup>Sheila Kitzinger, "The Rastafari Brethren of Jamaica," Comparative Studies in Society and History, IX (1966-7), 36.

<sup>26</sup>It is highly plausible that Haile Selassie will die in the not far distant future as he was born in 1891. He has been on the throne over forty years; and has as yet done nothing to further the repatriation wish of the Rastas.

<sup>27</sup>Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 49.



defined and limited by colour. Salvation requires a black skin. The Rastas are the chosen ones; the true Israelites, sold into slavery centuries ago. There is no hope for white or yellow people. To the Rastas anyone who is not a black is of 'Babylon' and possesses no opportunity for salvation. The elect is also defined by economic position - prosperous blacks are denied cult membership and hence salvation because they are felt to be traitors, having been co-opted into 'Babylon'. Rasta theologians insist that the truly holy believer cannot die and that only the living will enjoy the millenium. The mass of the faithful, however, has modified and expanded this doctrine to include the blacks of all time, both living and dead.

Talmon's classification of the importance of frenzied dancing, sexual aberrations and other types of unbridled emotionalism as a characteristic of chiliastic movements<sup>28</sup> does not fit well with Ras Tafarianism. The Brethren do not drink; view the sexual act as an obligation to ensure the preservation of the black race;<sup>29</sup> and do not accept divine revelations, visions or trances from members.<sup>30</sup> Many, but not all, however, smoke ganja. Unsubstantiated

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<sup>28</sup>Talmon, "Millenarism," 351.

<sup>29</sup>Kitzinger, loc. cit., p. 37.

<sup>30</sup>Lanternari, op. cit., p. 162.





rumours have denounced the Brethren as believers in the offering of human sacrifice to God.<sup>31</sup> But there has never been any evidence to substantiate this claim. However, the smoking of ganja was held to be responsible, in some way, for the "Holy Thursday Massacre" of 1963<sup>32</sup> when several Rastas were alleged to have axed four persons, including two police officers. Nonetheless such violent outbreaks on the part of the Brethren have been rare. For the most part the Rastas seem to live up to their motto of being "non-violent, non-subversive, non-abusive, non-compromising and non-political."<sup>33</sup>

Haile Selassie, technically speaking, is not a Messiah if that role is interpreted as one of mediation between the human and the divine.<sup>34</sup> While Haile Selassie does not consider himself to be a human divinely inspired to save mankind, he is to the Brethren the living God. For them the Emperor's divinity is confirmed in his great humility in not proclaiming his Godhood; the cultists quote Christ's words on the humble man being exalted. As a

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<sup>31</sup>Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>32</sup>HAR, 1963, p. 363.

Barrett, op. cit., p. 158.

<sup>33</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>34</sup>Talmon, "Millenarism," 351.





devout Christian Copt the Emperor worships Christ as God. Yet Haile Selassie has made no effort to correct what must be the worst blasphemy to any Christian - the belief in his own divinity. The Emperor has always acted as a most gracious host to visiting Brethren spokesmen on their several trips to Africa.<sup>35</sup> Arriving in Jamaica in 1966 he received the warmest and most sincere welcome ever given a visitor.<sup>36</sup>

The only effort, if it can be described as such, of Emperor Haile Selassie to hasten the repatriation of the Ras Tafarians, was to set aside in 1955 five hundred acres of "very fertile and rich land" for the "Black people of the West."<sup>37</sup> This land was the personal property of the Emperor and to this date it has been his only 'gift' and one not directed to the Rastas specifically. The Emperor presented the acreage to the "Black people of the West" through the Ethiopian World Federation, Incorporated (EWF), a body organized in New York in 1937.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Included was a visit sponsored by the Jamaican government in 1961. Barrett, op. cit., pp. 93-4. It would appear that nothing concrete has ever come of these visits other than giving the pilgrim added prestige in the Brethren.

<sup>36</sup>Daily Gleaner, 1-4 April, 1966.

<sup>37</sup>Taken from a letter reprinted here as Appendix III and found in Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

<sup>38</sup>Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 13.



The Federation has several branches in Jamaica although its headquarters are in New York. The EWF does not believe that Haile Selassie is God but rather respects the Emperor as its spiritual leader.<sup>39</sup> The aim of the Federation is "to effect Unity, Solidarity, Liberty, Freedom and self-determination" for the "Black Peoples of the World" and to maintain the integrity of Ethiopia which the members view as their "divine heritage."<sup>40</sup> Neither the Emperor nor EWF headquarters has made any effort to raise funds for the prospective settlers. It has been left to the discretion of individual blacks who are both "skilled" and of "pioneer calibre" to finance their own journeys.<sup>41</sup>

The Emperor is greatly respected because he is the leader of the only African nation never to have been completely colonized. Whether rightly or wrongly the Ras Tafarians believe that it was his personal invincibility which drove the Italians from Ethiopia in 1941.<sup>42</sup> Haile Selassie claims direct descent from the brief union

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<sup>39</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>40</sup>Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p.13.

<sup>41</sup>Appendix III, sections 3 and 4.

<sup>42</sup>Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 9.



of Solomon and Sheba; through Sheba he is the heir to the throne of Abyssinia, but more importantly, through Solomon he is a descendant of the children of Israel, God's chosen people of the Bible.<sup>43</sup> Recalling the words of Marcus Garvey, uttered in the 1920's ("Look to Africa where a black king shall be crowned for the day of deliverance is near") it is noted that Ras Tafari was crowned Emperor Haile Selassie in November, 1930, at a time when Garvey's message was still fresh in many minds.

The Brethren argue in justification of the Emperor as God, on the grounds that no one has seen the white spirit God in Heaven, whereas all can see Haile Selassie.<sup>44</sup> The white God is a sham; a deception to keep blacks enslaved with a promise of reward after death - one must die to see the white God. Ras Tafarians do not believe in death. They believe that the Emperor will not die;<sup>45</sup> and that eternal life and happiness is won, not through death, but through repatriation to Ethiopia.<sup>46</sup> This belief is justified not only by the still very youthful

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<sup>43</sup>The Brethren believe that all blacks are the descendants of the ancient Israelites, scattered throughout the world for past transgressions. Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>44</sup>Kitzinger, loc. cit., p. 36.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 38.





membership of the Rastas but by the fact that Haile Selassie has not yet died as well as by the rather loose organizational links between the various groups. If the Brethren were more closely allied in one organization, the loss of the founding members, both to asylums and death, would have been more noticeable. Each group has had some few members who have died, most commonly women in childbirth.<sup>47</sup> Rastas will not permit their women to have medical assistance at childbirth since their religious beliefs prevent the shaving of any hair. As a result even minor birth complications can lead to the death of the mother, child, or both, because of the absence of trained personnel. Some Rasta men have died from wounds incurred in battles with the police. Other cultists have died through age or illness. In all cases the devout have explained away these deaths as caused either by the individual's own sins or by the wickedness of the white world.<sup>48</sup> Recent theological changes on the idea of immortality are, however, modifying this doctrine as well.

Within Ras Tafarianism there are many groups and many philosophies. There are really only two commonly held articles of faith: Haile Selassie is the living God;

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<sup>47</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>48</sup>Kitzinger, loc. cit., p. 38.



and salvation through repatriation to Ethiopia. The various groups of Brethren live either in camps or in their own private dwellings.<sup>49</sup> Simpson has placed the usual congregation at 25 to 100 members, although he had known of groups where the gathering was as large as 150.<sup>50</sup> Despite the size of the assemblies all were noted for their openly democratic spirit.<sup>51</sup> Everyone is encouraged to speak and decisions are made on a majority vote of the membership. The democratic atmosphere in Rasta meetings stands in sharp contrast to the highly structured and elitist leadership of Revival and Cumina - Jamaican Afro-Christian movements.<sup>52</sup> Part of the explanation for the proliferation of congregations and beliefs is the populist spirit of the various Rasta groups. Fissiparous tendencies are strong because the leadership role is open to all<sup>53</sup> and there is no ordained priesthood. Ras Tafarianism, like other millenarian movements, is against those in

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<sup>49</sup>It is commonly accepted that all Rastas live in camps, but very few in fact do. Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>50</sup>The congregation holds its service at the camp. Simpson, "Race and Class Conflict," 167.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 167. See Joseph G. Moore, Religion of Jamaican Negroes, for a detailed discussion of the hierarchical structure of Cumina and Revival.

<sup>53</sup>Talmon, "Pursuit of the Millenium," 134.



power and preaches "radical rejection of the present as totally evil and abysmally corrupt."<sup>54</sup> Such anti-authoritarian speech tends to attract the rebellious and contentious and seems to perpetrate internecine strife.<sup>55</sup>

Proselytizing street meetings, usually held twice weekly, are very loosely structured<sup>56</sup> with spontaneous songs and speeches. The religious services held weekly at the groups' headquarters are more formal.<sup>57</sup> One or several 'leading' brothers<sup>58</sup> presides over the general congregation and such gatherings are always opened and closed by prayer chaplains.<sup>59</sup> Groups large enough to merit them have recording secretaries and treasurers. Perhaps the most essential office, at least to ganja-smoking groups, is that of the sergeant-at-arms. He is the one who guards the gate to a group's headquarters, decides whom to admit and is constantly alert for the arrival of the police.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>56</sup>Simpson, "Race and Class Conflict," 168.

<sup>57</sup>Special meetings are held in November to commemorate the anniversary of Haile Selassie's coronation. At this time babies are dedicated to the Emperor. Simpson, "Race and Class Conflict," 168.

<sup>58</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 141.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 142.





Although there is some structural organization within the groups of Rastas, there has not been a strong co-operative spirit between groups. An attempt at building ties was undertaken by 'Prince' Edward C. Edwards, head of the African Ethiopian Congress and the Melchezedec Orthodox Church in 1958.<sup>61</sup> But the spokesmen for the various Rasta sects could agree only on their intense dislike of the Jamaican police.<sup>62</sup> 'Prince' Edward C. Edwards represents the mystico-religious orientation of most Rastas to their position in Jamaican society. He is vehemently against the government and refuses to come to any form of an agreement with it on social reform. His only dealings with authority are constant petitions for government-sponsored and supported repatriation schemes.<sup>63</sup> Two other groups which share 'Prince' Edwards' approach are the Rastafarian Repatriation Association of Jamaica,<sup>64</sup> and the Rastafarian Brethren United Front.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>62</sup>The assembled Brethren unanimously agreed that the Jamaican government should decapitate a policeman as a sign of its goodwill towards the Ras Tafarians. This was not done; but the police razed and burned the camp where the unity congress had been held within a few months of that convention. Barrett, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>63</sup>Barrett, op. cit., pp. 113-7.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 107-11.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., pp. 119-21. This group publishes a small newspaper, supposedly weekly, called Ethiopia Calls, which keeps abreast of repatriation news.





The other well-known group of Brethren is the Rastafarian Movement, African Recruitment Centre, under the leadership of Sam Brown. This particular group of Rastas have always been political militants. Sam Brown even stood for office in the Kingston Corporate Area election of 1961 and the National Election of 1962.<sup>66</sup> His supporters believe that Jamaica is theirs, but they want to gain control legitimately through elective office. They feel that Jamaica's two major political parties have sold out the poor man for personal monetary gain.<sup>67</sup> Sam Brown's militancy has not been at all favourably received by the other Rasta groups. He and his followers are viewed as madmen who have lost sight of the greater vision: Ethiopian repatriation.

The four groups discussed can be considered fairly representative of the organizations of the Rastas. Political activists are a minority and they are not all that welcome. The overwhelming majority of the Brethren live their own lives and come together as a congregation only for their weekly services. For many, Ras Tafarianism is a religion and little more. They are not fervent and

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<sup>66</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 103.  
Daily Gleaner, 24 August, 1966, p. 12.

<sup>67</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 101.



dedicated; they neither proselytize nor become religious hermits. Religious beliefs are part of one's daily existence along with work and rest. For this majority, the myth of the millenium is the least strong theological element. It has been pushed into the remote future, and the more immediate problems of daily survival in Jamaica remain ascendant.

The markedly non-violent philosophy of the Ras Tafari Brethren is further evidenced in their beliefs concerning the coming of the millenium. Haile Selassie will merely formalize the arrangements and repatriation will occur. There has never been any mention of a struggle between the forces of good and evil, nor has the possibility even been considered that nations may challenge this migration. It is seen as a natural and final event, predestined since the day of exile.<sup>68</sup> It is the consumation of all history, the final future. It will occur, the days having been fulfilled, in Ethiopia. Those who have concentrated their thoughts on the non-blacks living in Africa at the time of the millenium, have satisfied themselves that they will be either exiled,<sup>69</sup> killed, or

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<sup>68</sup>Simpson, "Millenial Aspect," 93.

<sup>69</sup>Some Rastas believe that good whites and yellows will go to 'Heavens' in Europe and China. Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., pp. 49-50.



enslaved.<sup>70</sup>

The millenium will usher in an era of perfect contentment, a time for men to sit in the shade of their fig trees, "liberated from all the limitations of human existence, redeemed from pain and transience, from fallibility and sin, thus becoming at once perfectly good and perfectly happy."<sup>71</sup>

A great majority of Rastas believe that they personally can do nothing to hasten the day of repatriation. The living God will do that himself. At the same time, however, the Brethren act most unco-operatively with the larger Jamaican society. They keep their children from school, refuse medical assistance, turn down opportunities to be relocated in public housing units and display open hostility to social workers and others who wish to ease their desperate privations. It seems that in this way the leadership and their followers hope to strengthen the bonds among the members and widen the division with the larger Jamaican society. To them the wickedest of all are the preachers, teachers, politicians, and police.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Simpson, "Race and Class Conflict," 169.

<sup>71</sup>Talmon, "Pursuit of the Millenium," 130.

<sup>72</sup>George E. Simpson, "Culture Change and Reintegration Found in the Cults of West Kingston, Jamaica," Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, XCIX (1955), 91.





The Brethren refer to themselves as Africans, not Jamaicans, and emphasize their differences from those who accept the rule of 'Babylon.' They have established their own form of education for the Brethren. Courses are provided in Amharic, the language of Ethiopia and in African ways of life to prepare the membership for full participatory roles in Africa.<sup>73</sup>

#### RELIGIONS OF THE OPPRESSED AND MILLENARISM

The essential aspect to focus on is, it would seem, the rootlessness and powerlessness of the individuals concerned. At this point it may be appropriate to consider the differences between religious movements of the oppressed classes and millenarian religious movements of the oppressed. Niebuhr has argued that a church is as natural a social group as the family,<sup>74</sup> in the sense that members are usually born into it. A church is, therefore, a part of the larger culture, and accommodates its ethics to that larger culture; in turn becoming representative of the morality of the majority. Membership in the church almost becomes socially obligatory.

But for those who are marginal to the society, the uneducated and economically and politically deprived who

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<sup>73</sup>Barrett, op. cit., pp. 136-7.

<sup>74</sup>H.R. Niebuhr, The Churches of the Disinherited (New York: Meridian, 1957), p. 17.



oppose the status quo, such a church would seem to be intrinsically evil. To the oppressed it is a means of perpetuating social injustice; rather than compromising their beliefs by acknowledging the rights of such a church in the spiritual realm, the oppressed have, it is asserted, throughout history resorted to establishing their own churches. These new sects emphasize the moral righteousness and purity of their members.<sup>75</sup>

Up to this point there is no different world view between religions of the oppressed and millenarian religious movements. However, certain of the criteria established by Talmon to define millennialism distinguish such movements from the more institutionalized philosophies of all other religions (both the established churches and similar religions of the oppressed). The themes of imminence, this-worldliness and collective salvation (some of Talmon's criteria) so central to chiliastic beliefs are not central to those other religions of the oppressed. Salvation, in accordance with their established teaching, is not considered imminent. On the other hand, to millenarians salvation will come tomorrow or "very soon". This doctrinal tenet tends to explain both the acute expectations of such

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-9.



believers and their lack of extensive, formalized organizations and structures. Why build marble temples when Heaven will come tomorrow?

A more obvious difference lies in the time and location of Heaven. Millenarians believe that the millenium will come in their lifetime, they will, therefore, never die; whilst the other churches teach that people must die before they go to Heaven - death is an unavoidable step towards Heaven. Paralleling the belief that one must die to live eternally most churches emphasize that each person is saved (that is, granted eternal life) as an individual; on his own merit. However, millenialists believe that salvation will be collective - all who believe in the imminent redemption will be saved at once; all others will be damned.

Millenarian religions, just as other religions, satisfy through their structure and community, the needs of their members for recognition and status. Why is it then that the Ras Tafarians are a millenarian movement rather than simply a religion of the oppressed?

It would seem that the answer lies in the rootlessness and unstable poverty of the Brethren. As has been mentioned, the Rastas are basically a Kingston phenomenon. Nearly all the Brethren live in the slums of West Kingston (Barrett estimated Rasta strength to be around 70,000





members in the mid 1960's.<sup>76</sup> These Dungleites are not integrated in any way into the life of the rest of Kingston. Nor do they feel any strong ties with each other. It is more like a jungle where only the strong survive.

Patterson's novel of the Dungle - The Children of Sisyphus<sup>77</sup> - concretizes this situation better than any other work on the people of West Kingston.

In rural Jamaica or in the small towns of the island poverty does not mean scavenging for food in a garbage dump; resorting to prostitution or theft; or murdering a person for a few shillings. Life in rural Jamaica is hard. But food (mostly fruits and root vegetables) grows with little care or effort. The diet may be monotonous but rural peasants have reasonably satisfied appetites. The climate is nearly always pleasant and comfortable shelter (for rainy weather and nights) can be built from the available grass. At the same time rural life provides for many warm friendships with others. Three or four generations of a family often share the same small plot of land; and the outlying district is rich with cousins and other relations. Life might be hard but it is not unbearable. There is no social disintegration in such a

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<sup>76</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>77</sup>H. Orlando Patterson, The Children of Sisyphus.





situation.

In the countryside there are many Afro-Christian religious cults, such as Revival and Cumina, none of which are millenarian. Substantial evidence of the influence of African beliefs is found in these religions, but they do not pose any kind of a threat to the status quo. Membership in Revival or Cumina does not suggest that a person will not vote in elections, send his children to school, or the like.

Yet this is just about what membership in the Ras Tafari Brethren frequently entails. There is total rejection of the social order and withdrawal from and non-cooperation with the larger Jamaican society. Such strong feelings against society would seem to be the result of total statusless within it. The rural migrant to Kingston arrives to find no job, few opportunities for work, and fewer friends. He does find slums more crowded and blighted than those of South America,<sup>78</sup> where nothing grows and even human beings "rot". He has no kinship ties here to speak about. The more impoverished the individual's situation, the more isolated he seems, and the greater is his awareness of prospects for

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<sup>78</sup> Editorial by Don Bohning in Daily Gleaner, 20 September, 1968.



further decline.<sup>79</sup> Greater also are the chances for such an oppressed person to establish or belong to a millenarian religion.

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<sup>79</sup>Talmon, "Millenarism," 354.



IV. THE SOCIAL PRECONDITIONS LEADING TO THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE  
RAS TAFARI BRETHREN.

TYPES OF DEPRIVATION

Although millennial movements have occurred in all social classes,<sup>1</sup> it has usually been the lowest strata - "the oppressed, the disinherited and the wretched"<sup>2</sup> to whom such beliefs have tended to have their strongest appeal. Severe and protracted suffering - a feeling of deprivation - colours the life-view of these people. Absolute deprivation occurs when individuals or groups become poorer over time.<sup>3</sup> Such is often the case with a conquered people who usually lose their freedom and wealth. Relative deprivation is relational;<sup>4</sup> a person or group feels disadvantaged, because he has nothing, only when he sees others possessing the goods he cherishes. In such a situation expectations and wants can often far outstrip the goods available. Up until now the economic factor has been most central in explaining deprivation. But multiple

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<sup>1</sup>Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (Fairlawn, N.J.: Essential Books, 1957).

<sup>2</sup>Worsley, op. cit., p. 225.

<sup>3</sup>Sylvia L. Thrupp, "Millennial Dreams in Action: A Report on the Conference Discussion," in Millennial Dreams in Action, ed. by Sylvia L. Thrupp, (The Hague: Mouton, 1962), p. 26.

<sup>4</sup>Simpson, "Millennial Aspect," p. 164.





deprivation, the combination of poverty, low status and powerlessness,<sup>5</sup> does much to explain the appeal of a movement such as Ras Tafariism to Jamaica's blacks.

The membership of the Ras Tafari Brethren is restricted to people of 100% Black African stock;<sup>6</sup> the descendants of the West African slaves brought over to work in the cane fields. The slaves were the lowest of the low in sugar society. Their black descendants have been dismissed by most as physically unattractive and culturally sterile. There has never been, until very recently, an interest in West African-influenced art, music or literature. All that was dignified and of quality wore the British mark. That is why all 'decent' Jamaican men wear waistcoats, jackets and ties in the sweltering afternoon sun - it is a symbol of being 'civilized'. The more rational and comfortable attire would be loose-fitting garments such as bush-jackets, kitenje shirts and djellabahs; the latter would appear to be the uniform of the African Ethiopian Congress, a Rasta group.

#### EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS

African-descended Jamaicans have been somewhat restricted in their choice of occupation. The slaves had

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<sup>5</sup>Talmon, "Millenarism," 354.

<sup>6</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 3.



no options; their duties were assigned to them. Since the abolition of slavery in 1838 black Jamaicans have, theoretically, been free to compete with all others for any office. Candidate selection is based on qualifications alone; but each Jamaican does not have an equal chance. Illiteracy is over 25%.<sup>7</sup> Although the government has promised that every child will have an education, the schools are inadequate to cope with the demand. The greatest need for primary schools is in the rural areas and the West Kingston slums. Yet these are the very areas where new schools have not been built and old ones lack facilities.<sup>8</sup>

The school curriculum is very similar to that of the English "public" schools. British (not Jamaican) history, civics and the classics are emphasized.<sup>9</sup> In rural Jamaica this poses insuperable barriers on the students, many of whom do not understand English well.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>B.L. St. John Hamilton, Problems of Administration in an Emergent Nation (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 151.

<sup>8</sup>HAR, 1963, p. 45.

<sup>9</sup>Blanshard stated that the education system in Jamaica was "about as significant for the people of the Caribbean as Arctic navigation." Paul Blanshard, Democracy and Empire in the Caribbean (New York: Macmillan, 1947) p. 104.

<sup>10</sup>For a discussion of the great differences between the language of rural Jamaicans and others see Beryl Bailey, Jamaican Creole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).



In 1957 the government inaugurated a generous scholarship programme to encourage high-school attendance, which runs at about 10% of primary school figures.<sup>11</sup> Over half of these scholarships have been won by the students of Jamaica's few fee-paying institutions - in other words, the offspring of the wealthy who can afford to educate their children.<sup>12</sup> The student from the overcrowded, understaffed, free school cannot compete with his counterpart in Jamaica's preparatory schools. As a consequence the restricted number of black high school graduates has resulted in the vast majority of the blacks retaining an inferior, unskilled position in the society at large.

#### ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Management and executive positions are still the preserve of whites in Jamaica.<sup>13</sup> With the Asians and coloureds they comprise approximately 20% of the population, yet virtually control both the island's resources and the resultant wealth and facilities.<sup>14</sup> The great mass of black Jamaicans are left propertyless, destitute

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<sup>11</sup>Hamilton, op. cit., p. 151.

<sup>12</sup>Michael G. Smith, The Plural Society in the West Indies, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), p. 316.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>14</sup>Phelps, loc. cit., p. 417.





and semi-literate. Young, poor blacks may dream of golden opportunities and perhaps the chance to become a professional - usually a doctor;<sup>15</sup> yet by the time that they are fifteen, and inevitably looking for work, they have adjusted their expectations accordingly and now hope to become tradesmen - professions are never mentioned.<sup>16</sup> But even this goal is not reached for the majority, who, in reality, become unskilled labourers, either in the city or rural districts.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps one of the greatest drawbacks to a semi-skilled occupation is the lack of adequate training facilities. As there are only six vocational institutes in the island<sup>18</sup> the great majority of craftsmen learn their trade through an apprenticeship system which rarely pays them. Quite often, in fact, the apprentice must pay his master to learn the trade.<sup>19</sup>

It should be self-evident that the black is very much at the bottom of the ladder in Jamaican society. Extricating himself from such a situation is not easy. The pivotal factor, causing frustration for many black

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<sup>15</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 201.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 207-8.

<sup>18</sup>Hamilton, op. cit., p. 151.

<sup>19</sup>Moore, op. cit., pp. 18-22.





Jamaicans, is the disparity between expectations and their fulfillment. Even rural Jamaicans daily encounter the automobiles, refrigerators and rich foods of the middle class. Few of them can expect to enjoy these goods however, given the economic situation in Jamaica, and its historical trend. Very briefly, the 1920's brought hard times for most Jamaicans.

World War I had disrupted sugar and banana markets;<sup>20</sup> and, consequently, the lives of thousands of peasants and dockworkers financially dependent on the export trade. The completion of the Panama Canal and the decisions of the governments of Cuba and Costa Rica not to import any more Jamaican field labourers contributed heavily to the dwindling opportunities for unskilled blacks to earn real wages abroad.<sup>21</sup> A large portion of these wages had been remitted as money orders to be spent in Jamaica. Previously labour intensive cane fields had been replaced by large scale and partially mechanized banana plantations, which required fewer workers, at the turn of the century.<sup>22</sup> Jobless Jamaican workers who returned to the island discovered that the remaining sugar plantations, in an effort

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<sup>20</sup> Eisner, op. cit., p. 171.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 147-8.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 127.



to economize and modernize, were streamlining their operations with larger acreages, machinery and fewer personnel.<sup>23</sup> With emigration virtually at a stop and employment in the countryside at a minimum, thousands of unskilled and uprooted blacks streamed into the island's capital in search of work.<sup>24</sup>

In Kingston there were only limited job opportunities, most in domestic service.<sup>25</sup> Industrialization was slow due to the shortages of raw materials, and, more importantly, due to the sheer lack of industrial power - coal and water power resources have always been scarce in Jamaica.<sup>26</sup> The commencement of bauxite mining in the 1950's<sup>27</sup> has

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<sup>23</sup>G.E. Cumper, "The Development of the West Indies," in The Economy of the West Indies, ed. by G.E. Cumper, (Mona: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University College of the West Indies, 1960), p. 9.

<sup>24</sup>The Corporate Area of Kingston - St. Andrew increased in population by 134.7% from 1921-1943. Eisner, op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>25</sup>Eisner reports that for the period 1881-1921 there was a rapid decline in the number of persons employed in agriculture, and a rise in those in domestic service.

% of Labour Force in Agriculture and Domestic Service<sup>a</sup>

1881	70%	10%
1891	63%	13 1/2%
1921	55%	18%

<sup>a</sup>Eisner, op. cit., pp. 163-4.

<sup>26</sup>Eisner, op. cit., p. 172.

<sup>27</sup>The valuable alumina content of Jamaica's red soil was known as early as 1869. Gleaner Geography, p. 30.



given the Jamaican economy a tremendous boost,<sup>28</sup> but the effects on the life of the lower class blacks have been negligible. Bauxite-mining and alumina-processing, the latter severely limited due to the lack of necessary water power,<sup>29</sup> employ very few people. Those who are hired, moreover, must be skilled.

The squalor of urban life in Jamaica is most conspicuous in the Kingston slums. Large numbers of rural blacks who cannot find work in the capital, have squatted on the swamplands by the city's docks - an area in West Kingston known as the Dungle. The Dungle has never been a part of the tourists' Jamaica; it is a human wasteland. There are no apartment towers in the Dungle yet one square mile of it housed over 20,000 people in 1966.<sup>30</sup> There are no hospitals. The first housing project of 200 units was announced only in November, 1966,<sup>31</sup> four months after over 2,000 people were made homeless by a government-ordered

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<sup>28</sup>In 1967 the value of alumina and bauxite exports accounted for 50% of the total value of island exports. Jamaica, Department of Statistics. Quarterly Abstract of Statistics, March 1968 (Kingston: Government Printer, 1968), p. 17, Table 23.

<sup>29</sup>Approximately 1/6 of the bauxite mined in Jamaica can be converted into alumina. Gleaner Geography, p. 31.

<sup>30</sup>From an editorial by Don Bohning in the Daily Gleaner, 20 September, 1966.

<sup>31</sup>Daily Gleaner, 3 November, 1966.





demolition of one of the area's worst slums. The housing project was to include a youth centre, a craft institute and a junior secondary school. The feasibility of establishing a junior secondary school at that time must have been viewed as rather optimistic, since the area did not even have, as earlier mentioned, proper primary school facilities.

The Rastas have always found their strongest following in the Dungle. Dungleites are encircled by the visible prosperity of others. The aesthetically pleasing Blue Mountain Hills which ring Kingston provide shelter for a very different population than that of the swamp-land dwellers near the docks.

The residential sections of the suburbs rise gradually toward the Blue Mountains, and as they rise the temperature falls about 1° for each hundred feet of elevation, the income rises about \$500 a year, and the racial complexion of the residents changes with the elevation.<sup>32</sup>

Talmon stresses that both willingly or unwillingly and consciously or unconsciously the lifestyle of the upper classes - as is the case of those of the Blue Mountain Hills in Jamaica - is acknowledged as superior, causing much self-doubt and self-hatred.<sup>33</sup> Similarly amongst the deprived the shame of feeling culturally

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<sup>32</sup>Blanshard, op. cit., pp. 86-7.

<sup>33</sup>Talmon, "Pursuit of the Millenium," 138.



inferior seems to have resulted in an increased desire to emphasize the greatness of one's history and civilization, by maintaining the "black is beautiful" theme through the contra-cultural appeal of ageless black grandeur. The splendors of ancient Abyssinia and the scholarship of their 'black' Israelite ancestors are constantly recalled by the Rastas. By withdrawing from participation in the larger Jamaican society and developing their own religious and secular code (an example would be Howell's pronouncement at Pinnacle that stealing by the elect is permissible) the Rastas are trying to create a new system of values and a dignified identity.

Social isolation cannot be overlooked in projecting possible causes for the development of a movement such as the Ras Tafari Brethren. It is believed that the destruction of kinship and village ties resultant from individuals migrating to the cities has tended to deny the newly created "urban jetsam" any feelings of security.

Once rural Jamaicans migrate to an urban area they rarely maintain ties with relatives and friends in the country. Marriage-type and the subsequent family structure would seem to have much to do with this. The illegitimate birth rate in Jamaica is about 75%.<sup>34</sup> Much of this occurs

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<sup>34</sup>Madeline Kerr, Personality and Conflict in Jamaica (London: Collins, 1963), pp. 106-7.



in the black, lower-classes. Sexual experience, it is stated, often starts at the age of twelve for both sexes.<sup>35</sup> Males and females both commence their sexual lives with numerous, successive extra-residential mates, leading eventually into either a "Keeper Family"<sup>36</sup> or "Faithful Concubinage" relationship.<sup>37</sup> Few couples ever undertake the church-blessed marriage of the upper classes.

The "Grandmother Family",<sup>38</sup> an outcome of successive extra-residential matings which have not resulted in either of the above-mentioned forms, is a mateless unit of a woman, her children and their children (and sometimes even the children of these latter offspring), all living together and sharing expenses. Needless to say life in rural Jamaica is hard and these women, though they furnish the basic essentials for their children, cannot provide

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<sup>35</sup>Fernando Henriques, Jamaica, Land of Wood and Water (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1960), pp. 157-8.

<sup>36</sup>A "Keeper Family" is one where the man and woman live together, with or without their children. The man, however, is not obliged to contribute to the upkeep of his woman. Quite often in fact, he does not. Henriques, op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>37</sup>In "Faithful Concubinage" the man and woman live together with their children. In all respects they are like their legally married counterparts. Unlike "Keeper Families" which are usually of short duration and in which the man has little obligation, the male in "Faithful Concubinage" takes on the duty of providing for his wife and children. Henriques, op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>38</sup>Henriques, op. cit., pp. 146-7.





much else. Their children often leave home at an early age, having no other option, never to return.

Rural Jamaicans are proud. They will neither marry, nor permit their children to attend school, nor visit their villages (if they have moved away) unless they have fine clothes to wear as a visible sign of their financial success.<sup>39</sup> Because these things are difficult to get due to lack of remunerative employment few ever do marry (in our sense of a formal ceremony) or pay visits home.

In considering the "Grandmother Family" unit it is important to emphasize that an individual is usually fondly attached only to his (her) mother and perhaps grandmother: fathers are peripheral figures for more than one reason. Normally families are large, yet each of eight children could have a different father. A father usually has to leave his family in order to go away to look for work, thereby breaking ties. Urban migration attracts him with the dream of succeeding. But in the city he soon finds that he cannot do this. At the same time he does not enjoy the kinship and regional ties so important in the stabilization of migrants.<sup>40</sup> The result

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 144-5, 152.

<sup>40</sup> For an appreciation of how strong familial ties can aid in urbanization without isolation and breakdown see, Oscar Lewis, "Urbanization Without Breakdown: A Case Study", Scientific Monthly, v. LXXV (1952), 31-41.





is social isolation far more complete than anything to be seen in North America since the insulation from kin groups is almost complete. Thus rural migrants to Kingston must face the privations of the Dungle essentially alone. The strength to live with the presence of nasty rent collectors, crime, poverty and unemployment may be found through shared membership in a millenarian brotherhood where all share a common faith.

That sanctuary from a hostile society is sought in a religious movement rather than through membership in a political group does not seem such an unreasonable choice for the individual who becomes a Ras Tafari. "The proliferation of Negro cults is not a product of any 'inherent religiosity of the Negro' . . . . It derives from the 'comparatively meagre participation of Negroes in other institutional forms of . . . culture'." <sup>41</sup> Both Lawrence <sup>42</sup> and Worsley <sup>43</sup> viewed millenarian movements as proto-nationalism. In the case of Jamaica's Rastas it is the marginal, mal-integrated, blacks, long denied any political role, who turn to a chiliastic solution. It is the political helplessness, the powerlessness of not having the means to achieve solutions to their problems, which

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<sup>41</sup>Worsley, op. cit., p. 233.

<sup>42</sup>Peter Lawrence, Road Belong Cargo (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), p. 222.

<sup>43</sup>Worsley, op. cit., p. 228.



has driven many black Jamaicans to acceptance of the millennial dream of repatriation.

#### POLITICAL POTENTIAL

Jamaica has maintained a two-party system since the first elections in 1944 although every election has produced third-parties. It is not unfair to say that both the PNP and the JLP started out as labour parties and have ended up very much middle-of-the-road protectors of foreign investment. Bustamante supposedly was encouraged by the British Governor to break the 'leftwards' drift of the newly formed PNP by starting his own party, the JLP, in 1941.<sup>44</sup> The 'socialist' PNP went so far as to purge all its 'leftists' in 1953.<sup>45</sup> By 1960 the PNP had lost all taint of socialism, defining progress not as public ownership of resources but as economic prosperity; and nationalism as racial harmony.<sup>46</sup>

In the first election (1944) the Jamaica Democratic Party was the party of capitalism, representing mercantile and planter interests.<sup>47</sup> With only 4% of the popular vote the party disappeared after the election. Its beliefs,

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<sup>44</sup>Hughes, loc. cit., p. 346.

<sup>45</sup>Phelps, loc. cit., p. 464.

<sup>46</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 311.

<sup>47</sup>Bradley, loc. cit., p. 379.



however, were reincarnated in the Agricultural and Industrial Party in 1949. This party put in a disastrous performance at the polls obtaining less than 1% of the votes cast.<sup>48</sup> Subsequently, in 1955, several wealthy planters stood as candidates of the Farmers Party and took almost 4% of the votes.<sup>49</sup>

The 1955 election was the first for the newly purified PNP. The leftists expelled from the party started two splinter parties, the more moderate of which, the National Labour Party, won TUC support,<sup>50</sup> but only 1% of the vote.<sup>51</sup> The more radical Marxist People's Freedom Movement fared even less well with not even one-half of one percent of the vote.<sup>52</sup>

Millard Johnson, a militant, black lawyer had founded the People's Political Party (PPP) in 1961 on distinctively

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 390.

<sup>49</sup>Hughes, loc cit., p. 349.

<sup>50</sup>After the TUC was dropped from its affiliation with the PNP for its leftist tendencies, most of its members joined the PNP's new trade union, the NWU. The TUC, although possessing an historic past as a driving force in Jamaica's labour movement, became a small and ineffective union, completely overshadowed by the NWU which competed successfully with the BITU in strength and numbers. Phelps, loc. cit., pp. 463-4.

<sup>51</sup>Bradley, loc. cit., p. 390.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 390.





racist lines. He called the PPP the blackman's party and constant references were made of Garvey. This was the island's first racially inspired party. In 1962 the PPP fielded numerous black candidates in the independence elections. They were distinctive in their African robes, slogans and dialects.<sup>53</sup> The only unique feature of its platform was the PPP's doctrine of hate against the whites and browns.<sup>54</sup> However, it polled less than 1% of the popular vote.

Elections were held again in 1967. The PPP and an extremely heterogeneous group of other small parties and movements formed the Jamaica United Party.<sup>55</sup> The United Party proved ineffective as a challenge to the JLP which again won the election, this time with less than 1% of the popular vote separating it from the PNP.<sup>56</sup> Prior to

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<sup>53</sup>Rex Nettleford, "National Identity and Attitudes to Race in Jamaica," Race, VII (1965-6), p. 69.

<sup>54</sup>Bell, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>55</sup>Operations and Policy Research Incorporated. Washington, D.C. Institute for the Comparative Study of Political Systems. Jamaica Election Factbook, February 21, 1967, p. 17. Among the groups which were included were the: Great Resistance Movement, United Progressive Party, National Democratic Party, People's Organization for National Unity, Masses Forum, People's Political Movement, Social Democratic Party, People's Political Party, Republican Party, Christian Women's Congress, Christian Socialist Party, National Freedom League.

<sup>56</sup>Mau, op. cit., p. 21.



the 1967 elections the JLP made two important changes.

Within the party, the aging and ailing Bustamante was replaced by the less charismatic Donald Sangster.<sup>57</sup>

Secondly, through the gerrymandering of the JLP-dominated Constituency Boundaries Committee, eight new constituencies favouring the JLP were created and the existing ridings were modified to the obvious favour of the JLP.<sup>58</sup> As well, elaborate voter identification techniques such as finger-printing throughout the island (and also picture-taking in the Kingston - St. Andrew ridings, PNP strongholds and slum areas) disenfranchised over 300,000 eligible voters.<sup>59</sup>

Although the number of votes separating the PNP and JLP has always been small, the JLP has held office in the island from 1944-1955 and also from 1962 to the present. Over the years the JLP has drifted from its militant trade unionism of the 1940's (when one-third of the legislatures' 32 seats were occupied by trade unionists).<sup>60</sup> In the 1967

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<sup>57</sup> Sangster died very shortly after this appointment and was replaced as Party Leader and Prime Minister in March, 1967 by Hugh Shearer, who maintains these positions today.

<sup>58</sup> Mau, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21. Eligibility to apply for voter identification cards means little to the Rastas and other blacks who, most likely, feel that their vote counts for nothing when the only choices are the JLP and the PNP.

<sup>60</sup> Phelps, *loc. cit.*, p. 459.



elections only three trade unionists were nominated by the JLP, although there were then 53 seats to contest.<sup>61</sup> The offices of both the JLP, and the opposition, PNP, as well as their trade union affiliates, are staffed for the most part by coloureds.<sup>62</sup>

#### SOCIAL INTEGRATION OR ISOLATION

In a society seemingly polarized by colour, the black child has fewer chances of achieving successful integration and participation in the dominant culture, prescribed by white standards. Knowing that he cannot become a fully accepted member of the paramount group, the black, it would appear, has three fundamental types of responses to react to in his particular situation. These are avoidance; aggression and acceptance.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Although there were only three trade unionists nominated there were fifteen farmers, whereas in the 1940's the JLP had chosen only three farmers to represent them. Phelps, loc. cit., p. 462. Michael Faber explained the JLP switch-over to rural support as a reaction against the seven years of PNP administration which had markedly favoured the townships, but most noticeably Kingston. The PNP's policies "accelerated the growth of the island's industrial and commercial centre but little else." Michael Faber, "A 'Swing' Analysis of the Jamaican Election of 1962: A Note," Social and Economic Studies, XIII (1964), p. 309.

<sup>62</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 316.

<sup>63</sup>George E. Simpson and J. Milton Yinger, Racial and Cultural Minorities (3rd ed., rev.; New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 158-75.





Kingston's black "urban jetsam" has displayed a willingness to try all three forms of responses (whether consciously or unconsciously) to the prejudice and discrimination always displayed by the larger society. The strongest example of avoidance, was Howell's commune, Pinnacle. That estate was strongly protected from outside encroachment by guards and vicious watchdogs.<sup>64</sup> Other Rasta groups have maintained 'camps' in the Dungle these have always been open to police harassment. The Rastas, nonetheless, employ avoidance tactics more than aggression or acceptance in dealing with the dominant community.

#### AVOIDANCE

The avoidance approach is reflected in the attitude of a large number of Rastas to work. These Rastas are willing to work only for black men, and preferably, those sympathetic to their beliefs.<sup>65</sup> They will not accept jobs from coloureds, whites or Asians. As has been observed in other groups which suffer blatant discrimination, the Rastas have developed a "separate economy" ideology;<sup>66</sup> by means of which all possible purchasing is

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<sup>64</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>66</sup>Simpson and Yinger, op. cit., p. 160.



done in Rasta markets.

An extension of the exclusive community, situated in an urban ghetto, is the call for a separate nation.<sup>67</sup> This avoidance response to prejudice and discrimination has already been mentioned in terms of Talmon's characterization of the basic beliefs of millenarian movements. The localization of the place of redemption, Ethiopia in Ras Tafarianism, serves both to focus the millennial beliefs of the Brethren on a specific, 'sacred' place; and also reveals aspects both of avoidance from the dominant culture and aggression against it. The Rastas insistence that Ethiopian repatriation is imminent and that black culture is pure and distinct from the sinful lifestyle of 'Babylon' signifies a great hatred for the place of prejudice and the social philosophy of the oppressors.

Pursuing the theme of repatriation further, the Brethren claim that they are superior to white men who are totally evil.<sup>68</sup> As the day of repatriation draws ever nearer the Ras Tafari reassures himself that very soon the tables will be turned and he will have power over the whites. He therefore comforts himself that he

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>68</sup> Simpson, "Race and Class Conflict," 168.



does not need the temporary comforts of 'Babylon'. Rather, he must have the strength to resist them for only a short while longer and his reward will be great. Such a religious attitude has been termed "vicarious avoidance"<sup>69</sup> because it aids one in overcoming the frustrations inherent in a low status role in society.

#### AGGRESSION

Aggressive activities against the larger Jamaican society have long been practiced by some blacks. Marcus Garvey was, of course, one of the earliest and most well-known preachers of black racial superiority - he was, in fact, an advocate of black chauvinism.<sup>70</sup> Garvey's appeal, as earlier discussed, was quite secular.

Another black Jamaican, with a somewhat similar message, employed a much more religious approach. Alexander Bedward attracted a large black following around Mona, a suburb of Kingston. Bedward, who proclaimed himself to be Jesus Christ in the skin of a black man, promised to destroy the earth and reward his faithful followers.<sup>71</sup> Although his prophesied ascent into Heaven failed, there are still black Jamaicans who await his return.

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<sup>69</sup> Simpson and Yinger, op. cit., p. 165.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>71</sup> Lanternari, op. cit., pp. 159-60.





It has never been mentioned in any of the writings to date that the Rastas employ humour as a means of expressing aggression; although humour is recognized as an almost universal form of releasing aggressiveness.<sup>72</sup> Nor has literature been a popular vehicle of expression. There is, however, the Nyiabingi Dance, an adaptation of a very old Jamaican musical form, believed to have originated with the Maroons, the "burra", a drum-dance used in the slums to welcome home prisoners.<sup>73</sup> The Nyiabingi Dance is a musical commitment to violence, disorder and "Death to white oppressors and their black allies."<sup>74</sup> The dance, also known as "Informant",<sup>75</sup> has been performed on numerous public holidays throughout the island, often at the request of the Governor-General and others who apparently fail to recognize its social significance.<sup>76</sup>

Direct physical aggression against one's oppressors has long been a part of Jamaican history. The famous

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<sup>72</sup>Simpson and Yinger, op. cit., p. 169.

<sup>73</sup>Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>75</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 112.



Tacky Rebellion of 1760 described above was only one of many bloody uprisings by the blacks in the island's almost 300 years of slave history. The Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 by the recently freed blacks was again directed against the whites and their coloured allies. Although in 1663 an Assembly had been established in Jamaica on a very limited franchise,<sup>77</sup> most of the eligible voters were of the planter and commercial classes who limited their political efforts to securing the position of their interest groups. The slave emancipation of 1838 which created 300,000 new citizens still denied them the vote because they lacked the property and financial qualifications, perpetuating, in fact, the dominance of the 1663 interest groups.

The numerical strength of the black masses failed to impress the white and coloured planters who refused to initiate any programmes of social reform, even though the droughts and hurricanes of the post-Emancipation decades were severe and the mass of the population was afflicted with extreme poverty. A British, Baptist Minister tried to bring the plight of the poor black Jamaicans to the attention both of the island's Governor and the Colonial Office in London.<sup>78</sup> An organized campaign for economic

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<sup>77</sup>In 1864, out of a population of approximately 500,000 less than 2,000 people were eligible to vote. Gardner, op. cit., p. 471.

<sup>78</sup>The minister was Dr. Underhill.



reforms was begun in the island by a coloured Assemblyman, George William Gordon.<sup>79</sup> Gordon was a Native Baptist. He received support from a group of black Native Baptists in the severely depressed parish of St. Thomas-in-the-East, led by their lay preacher, Paul Bogle.<sup>80</sup>

Bogle and his followers, however, became impatient with the unproductive meetings and investigations undertaken by Gordon. Arming themselves on 11 October, 1865 they marched to their parish seat, Morant Bay, thus precipitating the Rebellion. Although armed, the black Baptists only verbally protested against white supremacy on the island.<sup>81</sup> The colonial authorities, however, panicked and fired into the mob. Bogle and his followers retaliated.<sup>82</sup>

Victorious in their first skirmish with the white authorities, for the next several days, small, armed bands moved in a thirty mile radius of Morant Bay but plundered restrainedly. Interestingly enough, no crops were destroyed nor houses burned; and goods were taken only from whites and non-whites who had actively supported

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<sup>79</sup>Hall, op. cit., p. 244.

<sup>80</sup>Gleaner Geography, p. 60.

<sup>81</sup>Gardner, op. cit., p. 477.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 477.





the white classes' domination of all aspects of island life.<sup>83</sup> Very quickly, however, the rebellion was quelled by British troops and the Maroons who had been demobilized since the suppression of the island's last slave uprising in 1831.<sup>84</sup>

An official inquiry from London admitted of some "excesses" on the part of the administration in suppressing the rebellion, and suggested that the island become a Crown Colony so as to ensure a more equitable chance of development for all the island's citizens.<sup>85</sup> That this opportunity for equal access to education, health facilities, employment opportunities, etc., did not develop has already been noted in the marked educational and economic discrepancies of today's Jamaicans.

It is interesting to contrast the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 with the two Henry incidents of 1959 and 1960 in Jamaica. Early in 1959 a Jamaican who had lived many years in New York returned to the island. Rev. Claudius Henry, R.B.,<sup>86</sup> had been a member of the

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., pp. 477-82.

<sup>84</sup>In their almost thirty-five years of retirement, however, the Maroons had not lost their bounty-hunter attitude towards other blacks. They barbarously executed over 500. Bell, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>85</sup>Gleaner Geography, p. 61.

<sup>86</sup>Repairer of the Breach, Barrett, op. cit., p. 83.



EWF in America; but he established his own church, the African Reform Church in Kingston. Rev. Henry began to sell "Free" tickets to Ethiopia at 1/- each.<sup>87</sup> About 15,000 were sold and many 'pilgrims' streamed into Kingston in the late summer of 1959, having sold all their possessions and given away their money.<sup>88</sup> Henry convinced his followers that on 5 October, 1959 "Pioneering Israel's scattered Children of African origin"<sup>89</sup> would return home. The day of repatriation came and went with no ships (the means of transport promised) appearing. Only then did Rev. Henry reveal his plan to the thousands of bitterly disappointed black pilgrims. He told them that he had given the departure call to convince the Jamaican government of the large number of dissatisfied citizens who wished to be repatriated, in the hope that this demonstration of longing for migration to Ethiopia would inspire the Jamaican government to initiate discussions on repatriation with willing African governments.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>89</sup>Quoted from the advertisement on Henry's "Free" tickets in Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>90</sup>The Government did send a delegation, including 3 Rastas, to Ethiopia, Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone, between 4 April and 2 June, 1961. These nations were less than enthusiastic, however, about the prospect of a mass migration of the unskilled; they all stressed



Realizing that the imminent repatriation had been temporarily postponed those who had bought tickets either returned to their homes (the Kingston area or the countryside) or settled in the Dungle. The Jamaican police, however, were very interested in Rev. Henry, who through his sale of "Free" tickets had raised approximately £800 sterling. His Church was raided in the spring of 1960 and 2,500 electrical detonators, 1,800 ordinary detonators, supplies of cartridges and ammunition and large numbers of machetes sharpened on both sides, like swords, were found.<sup>91</sup> Henry was arrested, charged, tried and found guilty of treason.<sup>92</sup>

While Claudius Henry had been awaiting trial, in June, 1960 his son Reynold Henry led an invasion force of several American blacks,<sup>93</sup> all members of the First Africa Corps, into Jamaica. The seven Corpsmen operated from New York where they had raised funds, through armed robbery, for the liberation of the West Indies.

Reynold Henry's invading force had established its base of operation in a Ras Tafari camp in the Red Hills

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their desire only for skilled immigrants. Barrett, op. cit., pp. 89-93.

<sup>91</sup>HAR, 1960, p. 247.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 796.

<sup>93</sup>Reynold Henry, unlike his father, was an American, HAR, 1960, p. 387.





area, approximately fifteen miles North-west of Kingston. In a combined raid by the police and military units to capture the insurgents, two unarmed British soldiers had been killed.<sup>94</sup> Within the Rasta camp there had been a division between those who supported and those who opposed the violence espoused by the First Africa Corpsmen. Later, after the camp had been occupied, the police found the grave of three Rastas who had resisted the camp's take-over by the Corpsmen.<sup>95</sup> Although the Red Hills operation had been speedily terminated with little bloodshed, the legislature, fearful lest more disturbances should occur, passed the Public Safety Act - unique in peacetime - which allowed for the detention, without trial, for up to six months, of any person(s) deemed 'dangerous' by the Minister of Home Affairs.<sup>96</sup> Little was ever learned about the Corps, even during the trial of Reynold Henry and his followers, other than that their target of liberation activity was the West Indies.<sup>97</sup> There was much speculation that either or both Henrys had corresponded with the recently established government of Fidel Castro in Cuba;<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>95</sup>HAR, 1960, p. 387.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 456.

<sup>97</sup>HAR, 1960, p. 352.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 247.



and fears of an international, 'leftist' conspiracy against Jamaica were rampant.<sup>99</sup>

Eventually, in the ensuing trials Claudius Henry was found guilty of treason felony and sentenced to ten years at hard labour.<sup>100</sup> Reynold Henry and his six fellow Americans, along with several Ras Tafarians, were tried for treason felony and murder; but only Reynold Henry, one other American, and two Rastas were found guilty and hanged.<sup>101</sup> The others were acquitted.

The effective response of the Ministry of Internal Security to the threat posed by the Henrys would seem to have discouraged any other physical attempts to take control of the island. Little opposition was shown by the press or the public to the Public Safety Act. The constabulary was enlarged; salaries were increased; and promotions stepped up.<sup>102</sup> As well, the West India Regiment and the British Royal Hampshire Regiment were utilized to aid the police in their work.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> The fears were felt to be justified as Jamaica is rather isolated, situated in the Western Caribbean with its closest neighbours being Haiti and Cuba.

<sup>100</sup> HAR, 1960, p. 796.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 704..

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 456.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 387.



With Jamaica's independence in 1962 the Prime Minister, Sir Alexander Bustamante, promised the United States perpetual rights to a naval base in the otherwise unfriendly Western Caribbean.<sup>104</sup> Two and one-half years later; and only a few months after the earlier mentioned "Holy Thursday Massacre", during which several Rastas hacked four people to death; Bustamante signed an agreement for United States military assistance - for both personnel and material.<sup>105</sup>

Contemporaneous with the strengthening of its Internal Security Forces the government had undertaken extensive amendments to the Criminal Code. In 1961 the Dangerous Drug Law had been amended to allow for the hearing of cases relating to the cultivation, sale or otherwise dealing in ganja in the Magistrate's Court.<sup>106</sup> At the same time the penalties for infractions were made more severe. In 1963 the minimum for rape was set at seven years jail and a flogging. When two backbenchers in the Government party (JLP) spoke in opposition to this excessive measure they were forced to resign their government-sponsored nominations to the Senate.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> HAR, 1961, p. 720.

<sup>105</sup> HAR, 1963, p. 577.

<sup>106</sup> Annual Report on Jamaica, 1961, p. 72.

<sup>107</sup> HAR, 1963, p. 1067.





At the same time little was being done to rectify the lack of primary school facilities in the West Kingston slums. Neither the government nor the literate public appeared to be at all concerned about the acute poverty of so many other Jamaicans.<sup>108</sup> Herein lies the central problem of Jamaican society - no one really cares; social welfare programmes would appear to receive very low priority. So far aspects of avoidance and aggression have been discussed as typical responses of the impoverished blacks to this situation.

Displaced aggression and acceptance of one's inferior position could also be utilized. Most often displaced aggression involves redirecting hostility felt towards the dominant group against one's fellows (or substitute targets).<sup>109</sup>

A clear case of displaced aggression was the public backlash against Sam Brown of those Dungleites made homeless after the 1966 slum demolition. As earlier mentioned, Sam Brown had run as an Independent in the elections of

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<sup>108</sup> One of the few outcries against this trend in Jamaican life was printed in a local scholarly journal. "Already we spend four million pounds on internal security in the army and police force. Much of it could be better spent on feeding people instead of preparing to shoot them when they become too hungry to care." Public Opinion XXVII (7 June, 1963), 13. Quoted in Mau, op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>109</sup> Simpson and Yinger, op. cit., p. 170.



1961 and 1962. In both cases he received almost negligible support, but he did incur the wrath of the more religiously oriented of the Brethren who felt that his approach was too secular.<sup>110</sup> Although defeated and continually maligned by other Rasta leaders, Sam Brown and his group, the Ras Tafari Movement, African Recruitment Centre, continued to speak out for political change in Jamaica. In the 1966 demolition, Sam Brown's Dungle camp was razed; he, himself, had been arrested with his lieutenants,<sup>111</sup> a few weeks earlier.<sup>112</sup> Although the most obvious and logical reason for the government's demolition was that the government wanted to reclaim the Dungle swampland to expand its port facilities,<sup>113</sup> the dislocated Brethren blamed Sam Brown and his political activism for being the cause of all the trouble. These Brethren felt that if Sam Brown had been apolitical, the people would not have been bothered.<sup>114</sup>

#### ACCEPTANCE

The great majority of Rastas feel apolitical, they

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<sup>110</sup>This militant group is the only one mentioned which uses military ranks, of which there seem to be only two; Sam Brown as the commander and the rest as lieutenants. Barrett, op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>111</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>112</sup>Daily Gleaner, 23 June, 1966, p. 1.

<sup>113</sup>"Operation Bulldozer," an editorial in the Daily Gleaner, 13 July, 1966.

<sup>114</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 105.



have adjusted to their supposedly historical role as subjects and not participants. In other words, they have actually accepted their inferior position in Jamaica today, reassuring themselves by believing that tomorrow they will be repatriated to Heaven. There is, in their minds, no necessity to fight, oppose, or make demands on the Jamaican government. Today is but a moment and tomorrow is eternity. The great majority of Rastas are consciously resigning themselves to a position of low status in Jamaica, comforted that such forbearance and perseverance will bring great dividends later on. As with avoidance and aggression, there are variations among classes, ages and groups of blacks affecting the nature of the response.<sup>115</sup> The number of Jamaican blacks, however, who willingly accept an inferior role is rapidly declining. "Belief in inferiority may be gone, but one may still accept his status to hold a job, to gain a favour, or simply to avoid trouble: 'There is an insistent urge to conform to the pattern of expected behavior in the desire for personal security; and the resultant acceptance behavior may conceal varying degrees of resentment, hostility, or sheer fatalistic resignation'."<sup>116</sup>

The Brethren have, through their millenarian beliefs,

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<sup>115</sup>Simpson and Yinger, op. cit., p. 173.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 173.





created for themselves a happy and blessed future. Their hopes for repatriation make it much less difficult for them to accept the abuses perpetrated by the larger society. In contrast to the Rastas, poor blacks who do not experience the solidarity and friendship of a contra-cultural group often desperately, but unsuccessfully, strive to become part of the larger group which has rejected them.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., p. 173.



## V. RAS TAFARIANISM AS A DEVIANT SUB-CULTURE

In accepting an inferior status role within Jamaican society, brought about by their social deprivation, the Ras Tafarians have chosen to avoid any aggressive acts. When a person or group finds himself in a situation where he must solve a problem,<sup>1</sup> he has two choices; either he can solve the problem, or he can change the definition of the situation so that there is no problem. The Brethren's dilemma is that they are viewed as marginal members of Jamaican society - educational, occupational and cultural characteristics have prevented them from being fully accepted in the larger community. This dominant culture has validated its frame of reference to justify the conduct of all people on the island. Throughout Jamaica's history those individuals with the power to speak out have recognized, accepted and respected British administration, institutions and culture. Island history has consistently reaffirmed the preeminence of all things British. Even today, whites, Asians, coloureds and many

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<sup>1</sup>"All human action . . . is an ongoing series of efforts to solve problems . . . not only . . . the worries and dilemmas that bring people to the psychiatrist . . . [but] which of two ties to buy, what to do about the unexpected guest or the 'F' in algebra . . . all involve, until they are resolved, a certain tension, a disequilibrium, and a challenge." Albert Cohen, Delinquent Boys (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1955), pp. 50-1.



blacks continue to accept the social and economic standards suggested by British models.

#### CONTRA-CULTURAL FUNCTIONS

However, the Ras Tafari Brethren represent opposition to this dominant set of social and economic beliefs, for they feel strongly that such a system has not benefitted all Jamaicans equally. "Nobody can pretend that in Jamaica today the average black child, brown child and white child have equal chances at birth."<sup>2</sup> Claudius and Reynold Henry both attempted to employ coercion to change this situation. Samuel Brown and his followers opted for the ballot and the press as the legal instruments of change. However, as described above, neither approach proved successful. The consequence of this has been that the Brethren have now chosen to redefine the situation in terms more favourable to them. They seem to have accomplished this through the development of the millennial promise of repatriation to Ethiopia. By means of this imminent event the Rastas can constantly comfort themselves, and even delude themselves into believing that the degradations and humiliations of their low status in Jamaica will soon be ended and they will be richly rewarded for current privations.

Individuals cannot arrogate themselves status; for

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<sup>2</sup>Smith, Augier and Nettleford, op. cit., p. 23.





one's status is judged by others.<sup>3</sup> How well one measures up to the standards or norms set by others is decisive in gaining their esteem. If a person feels statusless he is beset by problems of adjustment<sup>4</sup> for, it is held that all individuals need to be recognized as worthy by others. If people are ostracized by the larger community their tendency is to gravitate towards other statusless individuals in anticipation of finding kindred fellowship, with beliefs and value systems similar to their own. Cohen observes that it is only when one's beliefs have been accepted by others that they merit validity;<sup>5</sup> and the individual gains personal worth. This function of granting a worthwhile identity to its members has probably been Ras Tafarianism's most concrete contribution to alleviating frustration among its followers. This is further confirmed by what Worsley considers its integrative role,<sup>6</sup> first, by the ideology of the millenarian movement supplying invaluable safeguards and supports,<sup>7</sup> in that it provides feelings of certainty and hope, not despair, since the

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<sup>3</sup>Cohen, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 65-6.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 56, 67.

<sup>6</sup>Worsley, op. cit., p. 227 ff.

<sup>7</sup>Talmon, "Millenarism," 359.



hostility against the larger community is subsumed in the fraternity of the movement and the dedication shown by the followers to the movement.<sup>8</sup> Second, the problem has not actually been solved; but the situation has been redefined. Also, the Brethren believe that they have been assured of ultimate victory - their faith has been divinely legitimized - they are a chosen people.

This attitude is reflected in a new identity as a collectivity; and the individual's sense of belongingness and purpose. The group develops an attitude of superiority to outsiders and becomes hostile and contemptuous of non-believers.<sup>9</sup> At least within his own milieu the cultist is able to walk haughtily, displaying an aura of self-confidence and moral righteousness. The non-believer is easily identified as the enemy - branded as "evil". In channelling their hatred, which originates in their social and economic oppression, on to these enemies, the group both releases its pent-up aggressions and reaffirms its own solidarity and integrity.<sup>10</sup>

As previously indicated friendships resulting from cult membership cannot be overlooked or underestimated.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Worsley, op. cit., p. 252.

<sup>9</sup>Cohen, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>10</sup>Talmon, "Millenarism," 359.

<sup>11</sup>Simpson, "Race and Class Conflict," 170.



Former rootless and marginal members of society now have emotional ties with sympathetic individuals. Further, the democratic atmosphere of Rasta groups allows for opportunities to gain special recognition through the holding of elective office or functioning as a speaker, organizer, musician and the like.<sup>12</sup> There are numerous opportunities provided to display talents and prowess through intellectual discussions, social events and recreational activities.

The Brethren seem to be able to offer limited financial security to those in need. In each group of Rastas there are always one or two members either awaiting trial or in jail for possession of ganja. Others might be ill or without any income whatsoever.<sup>13</sup> These people are provided for through donations of food, or are welcome into other cultists' homes.

Whether or not many of the Ras Tafarians realize it, the movement has, nevertheless, made them much more aware of politics in Jamaica. Previously isolated as individuals they were primarily concerned with survival; but as members of a contra-cultural group they are now openly opposing the status quo.<sup>14</sup> Talmon's assertion that millenarism

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>14</sup>Talmon, "Millenarism," 359.





rapidly activates and unifies formerly passive and disparate people and that conversion acts as a sudden and overpowering stimulus<sup>15</sup> finds some confirmation in the activities of the Ras Tafari Brethren. "Since millenarism has a strong collective orientation and is also activity-centred, this conversion does not lead . . . only inwards to repentance and meditation but draws [the faithful] outwards to involvement and activity in the movement."<sup>16</sup>

According to Worsley, millenarian beliefs are truly revolutionary, for, rather than promising mere improvement and reform, they advocate total transformation, thus arousing both great expectations and sacrifices on the part of their followers.<sup>17</sup> In this way, it is postulated that millenarian movements bring about a breakthrough to the future. "The millenarian cult normally goes through phases of development: change is intrinsic to it, since it looks to an order of things different from that which exists at present and makes demands of the world that cannot be granted."<sup>18</sup>

At the same time such movements link the past to

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<sup>15</sup>Talmon, "Pursuit of the Millenium," 141.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>18</sup>Worsley, op. cit., pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.



the future: tradition and myth are not completely overthrown. "Cohn himself notes that it is the revolutionary situation that calls the hither to obscure millenarian groups and their doctrines into daylight."<sup>19</sup> It would appear that in Ras Tafarianism the role of tradition is somewhat eclipsed by that of myth. Myths of past African grandeur inspire the Brethren to persevere. It does not matter to them that the black man receives only rudimentary education in Jamaica, as they consider the black man to be inherently a genius. Once repatriated he will find his true intellectual nature and will know everything at once, effortlessly.<sup>20</sup>

It is argued that millenarism provides for the recruitment of popular leaders tied closely to their followers.<sup>21</sup> New philosophies and statuses develop. It is possible for knowledgeable leaders of millennial movements to achieve numerous political goals for their followers without making them realize their political consciousness.<sup>22</sup> As mentioned previously, Claudius Henry attempted to do this in arranging for repatriation day on

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. xli.

<sup>20</sup>Simpson, "Race and Class Conflict," 169.

<sup>21</sup>Talmon, "Pursuit of the Millenium," 142.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 143.



5 October, 1959. Perhaps Henry appreciated that he probably could never have congregated 15,000 people on the Kingston docks if he had asked them to demonstrate on behalf of a government-sponsored repatriation policy. Henry, therefore, proclaimed that the day of repatriation had arrived in the hope that either the government would respond favourably or the people would react politically with violence. Thus, in this case millenarism could be viewed as a connecting link between pre-political and political activity.<sup>23</sup> Claudius Henry, it seems might have hoped to turn his followers from religious to political beliefs. His son, Reynold Henry, thought likewise but neither could bridge this division in such a short time. Sam Brown and his followers have somewhat closed the gap, due perhaps to a less ritualized congregation, with the emphasis on secular activity.<sup>24</sup> To this group the achievement of educational and social welfare rights for the Dungleites has always seemed more important than the celebration of Haile Selassie's coronation anniversary. How much farther the political spirit of this group may develop in the future cannot, at present, be adequately assessed.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 143.





As Talmon notes in her discussion on millennialism,<sup>25</sup> membership in millenarian movements in modern societies functions more as a competing alternative to membership in militant secular movements than as a precursor to political activity,<sup>26</sup> stating that Worsley's findings on nascent political activity have been confined to Africa and Melanesia.<sup>27</sup> Talmon suggests that in modern societies millenarian movements tend to be apolitical, whereas an examination of the Ras Tafari Brethren, as a millenarian movement, would indicate that this is not necessarily the case. Although Ras Tafariism has not completely abandoned its religious connection, it, nevertheless, as pointed out previously, has developed political consciousness among its followers, in some instances to the point of militancy.

#### DYSFUNCTIONS

Dysfunctionally, from the point of view of established authority, millenarian movements can, and have, initiated physical violence, even revolutions. Worsley, however, sees this as the movement's greatest function, for it leads to the rejection of a corrupt authority.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>28</sup>Worsley, op. cit., pp. 226-8.



Cohn feels that millennialism is "dangerous collective madness."<sup>29</sup> Millenarism is viewed as paranoid fantasy, a temporary outlet for extreme anxiety which deepens when the dream is not realized.<sup>30</sup> Most important for the larger Jamaican society, Ras Tafarianism impedes a large number of its followers from sharing in any efforts to better economic and social conditions in Jamaica,<sup>31</sup> at least within the existing structure. Worsley weighs a movement's strength by its ability to avoid being co-opted into the system. It is only through vigilant resistance to the system that the membership can preserve its dream. At the same time the worsening of the relations between the society and the contra-cultural group is eventually climaxed in revolution.

By constantly stressing the hopelessness of the Jamaican situation the Brethren negate any moves to improve conditions in the island. Rastas, as earlier mentioned, will not move into public housing or send their children to school. In doing this they are perpetuating their children's backwardness in Jamaican society.

Conversely they may in fact have made the other

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<sup>29</sup>Talmon, "Millenarism," 358.

<sup>30</sup>Simpson, "Race and Class Conflict," 170.

<sup>31</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 175.



larger segment of the population, the non-Rastafarian blacks, aware of their inferior status as compared to those of the whites, coloureds and Asians - a potentially explosive racial situation for the future.





## VI. CONCLUSION

In assessing the influence of the Ras Tafari doctrine on Jamaican society one's first reaction would be to conclude that the movement has failed, but this would be an oversimplification. Political activists, such as Claudius and Reynold Henry and Sam Brown, have not been able to attract any significant overt support. The social deprivation, isolation and frustration experienced by the majority of blacks, as the least consequential group in Jamaica, has to a great extent effectively retarded their active participation in community life.

The pyramid of white, coloured and Asian economic and political supremacy, clearly reflected in the formation of a comfortable and politically conservative middle class, provides little opportunity for the lowly blacks to improve their life-style. As pointed out, the basic quality of Jamaican life is its complete lack of integration.<sup>1</sup> Sugar and slavery separated the social position of the Jamaicans of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Emancipation in 1838 theoretically made all Jamaicans equal citizens but the heritage of the sugar or slavery distinction remained<sup>2</sup> to be carried by each

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<sup>1</sup>H.O. Patterson, "Outside History: Jamaica Today," New Left Review, XXXI (May-June, 1965), 39.

<sup>2</sup>Ruth Glass, "Ashes of Discontent: The Past as Present in Jamaica," Monthly Review, XIV (1962-63), 23.



individual through his skin colour.

Historically there have been recurrent violent eruptions,<sup>3</sup> both by the slaves and their descendants, against this exploitation. But much more of the hostility of these unfortunates has been repressed. The Maroons had their Accompong, this autonomous village was a government-sanctioned "avoidance" refuge. Leonard Howell and his Ras Tafarians followers built Pinnacle as a sanctuary from an unfriendly society. But rather than merely withdrawing from the Jamaican community the inhabitants of Pinnacle robbed from their non-believing neighbours. This inevitably resulted in numerous confrontations with the police and the eventual destruction of Pinnacle and the dispersion of its occupants.

The desire of black Jamaicans to participate in social groups and the upper classes' denial of their entry into the island's institutional forms of culture has resulted in a proliferation of religious cults, thereby confirming Worsley's prediction.<sup>4</sup> The Native Baptists, Revival,<sup>5</sup> Cumina and Convince have, like Ras Tafarianism,

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<sup>3</sup>This paper mentioned only the Tacky Rebellion of 1760, the slave uprising of 1831, the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 and the 1938 riots.

<sup>4</sup>Worsley, op. cit., p. 233.

<sup>5</sup>Revival has three forms: Pocomania, Revivalist and Revival Zion: J.G. Moore, The Religion of Jamaican Negroes discusses each.



made it possible for their members to express themselves and their feelings outside established Christian ethic. Whereas Christian influences are readily discernible in the other Jamaican cults, Ras Tafarianism stands in total opposition to Christian ritual. There is no church, altar or holy rites. For those who smoke ganja there is a form of communion;<sup>6</sup> but the acceptance of ganja is far from complete. Interestingly enough, Rastas use the music of Sankey hymns<sup>7</sup> adding their own words, an example being "Black Negus" (referring to Haile Selassie) which is substituted for "Jesus Christ". Also, there is much use of the Bible to confirm the doctrine of Ras Tafarianism and the firm conviction that the Bible is the Rastas' book, which has been distorted by the white man.<sup>8</sup> Seemingly, the Rastas have not been able to cast-off totally the influence of Christianity in their childhoods.

The most extreme (from the view of Christianity) tenet of Ras Tafarianism is that Haile Selassie is the living God. What will happen to the movement should the Emperor die? As has been indicated previously, this Ras Tafarian doctrine has undergone certain radical transformations in that Haile Selassie has become part of a

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<sup>6</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 144.





Trinity. His death would, by this transformation, seem to have been provided for. But in any case, the very fact that the doctrine has already been successfully modified would suggest that it could survive its disconfirmation by the Emperor's death.<sup>9</sup>

Somewhat surprisingly, in view of the criteria for evaluating millenarian movements specified by Talmon, Ras Tafariism is markedly pacific as regards the arrival of the millenium. Like other millenialists the Brethren fervently believe that the day of repatriation is imminent, but they make no effort to hasten the day. Unlike other movements, which feverishly prepare for redemption through intensive proselytization, enthusiastic ritual and even antinomian acts,<sup>10</sup> Ras Tafariism remains a very repressed and constrained religious doctrine. As pointed out, most cultists oppose the social order in Jamaica only verbally and frown upon all reform movements, whether violent or

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<sup>9</sup>The results of a university study, interested in learning how millenarian groups respond to the post-disconfirmation era, have suggested that the failure of a prophecy to materialize can, in certain circumstances, strengthen belief. Deeply held but disconfirmed convictions held by committed people can be sustained with the social support of other believers. "If more and more people can be persuaded that the system of belief is correct, then clearly it must, after all, be correct." Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken and Stanley Schachter, When Prophecy Fails (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), p. 28.

<sup>10</sup>Talmon, "Millenarism," 353.



otherwise, within their society. This, no doubt, is the greatest impediment to their widespread politicization, for, although completely opposed to the Jamaican government, few Rastas have been willing to become activists in any sense.

Orlando Patterson argues that a slave mentality is still present in Jamaica today in the black man's psychological perceptions of his role as a participant in society.<sup>11</sup> To share in the decision-making process as an individual, as a person, is too much for the ordinary lower-class black Jamaican. He has been conditioned not to think, but to react spontaneously to commands. His low status in society reinforces his belief in his inability to make a worthwhile contribution. He supports the millennial dream of repatriation because it requires no effort nor judgement on his part. Salvation will be granted soon, the Rastas's only obligation is to be patient.

Patterson's conviction has appreciable validity in the reactions of rural migrants who become "urban jetsam" and for the uneducated and unskilled youth. Religion is an escape: religious beliefs provide fertile soil for pleasant dreams of tomorrow. It is the tormented Dinah,

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<sup>11</sup>Patterson, loc. cit., p. 42.



the central character of The Children of Sisyphus, who realizes the psychological satisfaction of belonging to a religious group:

She came to realize that the men and women before her had something she longed for. It was simple and plain. They were untormented. By their singing and dancing and spiriting they had scraped their misery from themselves. They had ravished and exhausted their living hell. So now there was only the dead nothingness of joy.<sup>12</sup>

In postulating what might be the role of the Ras Tafari Brethren in the future the theoretical dissension between Talmon and Worsley has not been overlooked. Talmon's approach would apparently deny any political role to such a movement. She substantiates this by citing the "ephemeral outbursts" of medieval times and the overtly suppressed millenarism of the North American Indians.<sup>13</sup> Talmon sees millenarian religious movements and militant secular movements as hostily competitive. She further states, however, that it

. . . is clear that the actual functions which any millenarian movement performs in any given situation depend on the degree of differentiation between the religious and political sphere in the society in which it operates and on the chances it has to engage in active political action and carry out a successful revolution.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Patterson, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>13</sup>Talmon, "Pursuit of the Millenium," 144.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 144.





Worsley's politicization argument is thus not being completely dismissed by Talmon who does not deny its possibility but awaits confirmatory evidence.

Neither theorist would seem to have considered Jamaica's Ras Tafarians within their theoretical frameworks. Yet the Rastas, as marginal members of that society, would surely find it difficult to delineate their activities as strictly falling under the religious or political sphere. On the other hand, the privileged white, coloureds and Asians who sit astride the apex of the economic pyramid are members, for the most part, of the Anglican Church,<sup>15</sup> historically one of the most powerful and seemingly reactionary institutions in the island. Historically, the distinction between the religious and political spheres of this elite would be hard to define. As Niebuhr has suggested, the established churches are an important part of the political sphere for they sanction and represent, and thereby legitimize "the morality of the respectable majority"<sup>16</sup> in alliance with the nation's economic and cultural interests.

Worsley's contention is that no one escapes from acting politically by the very fact of being a member of

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<sup>15</sup> Bell, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>16</sup> Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 17.



society. Even anti-establishment religions, by their very position of being contra-authority, are political according to him. Without going so far as to endorse Worsley's generalized proposition, it is clear that the Ras Tafarians too cannot escape but being involved in politics. As individuals within the Brethren they are constantly being further alienated from the existing political system. Whether or not the Brethren will engage in violent politics against the Jamaican government depends, as Talmon postulates, on the opportunity for successful militancy.

It would seem that the Rastas by themselves are still too few and too fragmented conceivably to carry out any type of political action of any significance against the present-day Jamaican authority. But there are several hundred thousand black Jamaicans who are not Ras Tafarians. Some of these are better off economically, educationally and occupationally than the Rastas. Others are in similar or worse circumstances. These non-Brethren might laugh at the dream of Ethiopian repatriation but they do not scoff at the extreme poverty of their fellow blacks. They are acutely aware of Jamaica's colour-based economic pyramid and no doubt want to change it.

Jamaica's University at Mona, a Kingston suburb, did not escape the 1968, world-wide student radical upsurge on campuses. In October of that year three students were



killed while protesting the deportation of a black Guyanese lecturer, Walter Rodney, who had been charged with having issued revolutionary material.<sup>17</sup>

Another area of potential explosion is Jamaica's quiescent countryside. Following Rodney's deportation many students and "intellectuals" travelled to the countryside where they were reported to have been preaching a "black power" philosophy to the peasants.<sup>18</sup> The parallel to the narodnichestvo movement, Russian populism of the 1860's, is most striking here,<sup>19</sup> in that it was the reaction of that country's educated youth against the stagnating tyranny of Czarist rule to "go to the people."<sup>20</sup> The narodniks sought the basis for national regeneration in the simple faith and life of the rural folk. Their movement had strong religious overtones in that they believed that a mass uprising against the regime would bring an end to the oppressive reign of the Czars. This resort to the peasants to act as a revolutionary force failed at the time. Whether such tactics will fail in Jamaica is difficult to foresee.

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<sup>17</sup> Daily Gleaner, 1-31 October, 1968.

<sup>18</sup> Daily Gleaner, 10 April, 1969.

<sup>19</sup> Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, A History of Russia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 422-6.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 425.





The Jamaican government, however, has shown its concern in that, in order to combat this "black power" threat, it has started an adult education programme in the countryside, sending out strong government supporters who have been instructed to challenge "black power" sentiments whenever they are met.<sup>21</sup> This response of the government may seem, however, to fall into the category of "too little too late." In October, 1970 the social welfare allowance for the unemployed was as meagre as 35¢ Jamaican weekly, the equivalent of 27¢ Canadian.<sup>22</sup>

Even with the scant information available on anti-government activities available in Jamaica it would still be safe to suggest that there is an increasing opposition to it; both from students and peasants, a combination which has often, in other times and places, proved to be fatal. It has been the Ras Tafari Brethren, who since 1930 have perennially drawn attention to the plight of the black deprived in Jamaica, who have been in some way responsible for this political resurgence of the mass of the under-privileged.

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<sup>21</sup>Daily Gleaner, 10 April, 1969.

<sup>22</sup>Daily Gleaner, 1 October, 1970.



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## APPENDIX I

### Foundations of the Rastafarian Movement<sup>\*</sup>

1. Members of the Rastafarian Movement are an inseparable part of the Black people of Jamaica.
2. As such we cannot and do not proclaim any higher aims than the legitimate aims and aspirations of the Black people of Jamaica.
3. The Rastafarian Movement consists of the most advanced, determined and uncompromising fighters against discrimination, ostracism and oppression of Black people in Jamaica.
4. The Rastafarian Movement stands for freedom in its fullest sense and for the recovery of the dignity, self-respect and Sovereignty of the Black people of Jamaica.
5. Many deplore and accuse the black people of raising the colour question in this island. But White supremacy was the official policy of this Island for hundreds of years and white supremacists never regarded black men as good as the dogs in their yards.
6. To white supremacy has been added Brown-man supremacy and the mongrel children of the Black woman came to think and behave contemptuously of Black people.
7. Time has removed some of the grosser aspects of white and brown man supremacy: but discrimination, disrespect and abuse of the black people are still here in many forms.
8. For instance, in their employment policies, the big guns get generous salaries, house allowance, travelling expense and bonuses. The poor black man working in the same industry or enterprise cannot get adequate food money, and has to accept poor treatment and insults as part of the price of holding the job.
9. In their housing policy, they have houses for the rich, housing for the middle class and housing for the underprivileged. 'Underprivileged' is only another name in Jamaica for poor black people.

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<sup>\*</sup> Reprinted from Leonard E. Barrett, The Rastafarians, A Study in Messianic Cultism in Jamaica (Rio Piedras, Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico, 1968), pp. 102-103.



10. God did not say 'come let us make underprivileged man, middle class man and rich man.' He said 'come let us make man.' The existence of underprivileged man in Jamaica is, a product of white and brown man supremacy.
11. The Rastafarian Movement has as its chief aim the complete destruction of all vestiges of white supremacy in Jamaica, thereby putting an end to economic exploitation and the social degradation of the black people.
12. The Rastafarian Movement stands for Repatriation and power and for the fullest co-operation, and intercourse between the Governments and people of Africa and a free and independent people of Jamaica.
13. The Rastafarian Movement for the furtherance of these ends must have the backing of its support to, or lead, a political movement, of its own.
14. The Rastafarian Movement has the backing of no party. We are subject to persecution and discrimination.
15. The Rastafarian Movement has lent its support to the two big Parties, this support has been in vain because no improvement has taken place in our condition. Neither are we offered or do we see any hope.
16. The Rastafarian Movement therefore has decided to actively join the political struggle and create a political movement with the aim of *taking power* and implement measures for the uplift to the poor and oppressed.
17. Because we have no other aims than the legitimate aims of all black people in this Island as stated in clause 2, this movement is open to all black people, irrespective of class, religion or financial standing.
18. We are not declaring against the political leadership of white men and brown men because of their colour; but because of the wickedness that they represent and invite them to repentance.
19. Consequently, if a man be as black as night, his colour is in our estimation of no avail if he is an oppressor and destroyer of his people.
20. All men therefore are free irrespective of colour to join this political crusade. The only condition is that he must abandon evil.
21. Suffering black people of Jamaica, let us unite and set up a righteous Government, under the slogan of Repatriation and power.





## APPENDIX II

### Niyabingi Men<sup>\*</sup>

*The Niyabingi section of the movement seems to have originated in Jamaica as a result of the publication of the following article in the Jamaica Times on December 7th, 1935.*

*This article, which appeared shortly after the invasion of Ethiopia by Italy, does not carry conviction. Its alleged facts are most probably inventions by the Italian propaganda machine, designed to discredit the Emperor. However, its statements were accepted at face value by some Ras Tafari brethren, who thereupon constituted themselves members of the "Niyabingi Order", and preached violence against whites.*

The text of the article follows:

"Today it is a "black peril" which darkens the European horizon and which has eclipsed the yellow menace in the minds of the public. Up from the depths of the jungle and out of the hearts of modern cities, from all parts of the African Continent and from countries where coloured people live, the blacks are flocking to the standard of an organisation which dwarfs all similar federations. Hitherto, diverse religious beliefs coupled with the stupidity of primitive peoples prevented such an amalgamation. But today it is a fact! The blacks are welded into an ominous secret league, most remarkable of which is that its existence is scarcely known.

### Nya-Binghi!

The words mean "Death to the Whites" or "Death to the Europeans." This is the name of this secret society. It sprang to life in the Belgian Congo. Angered by the penetration of white people into their territories, King Mocambo the Second and his nephew formed a dual alliance and swore bloody revenge on the intruders. At the time of its inauguration in 1923 it was insignificant, but since then it has become a menace to Europe.

Although the news of the alliance flew like wild-fire across the continent and despite alarming telegrams from

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<sup>\*</sup> Reprinted from Michael Smith, Roy Augier and Rex Nettleford, The Ras Tafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica (Mona: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University College of the West Indies, 1960), pp. 43-47.





colonial officials in European colonies to their home governments, no one in Europe really took the matter seriously except the French and Belgian governments. But today all the European powers are decidedly uneasy. It is an incontestable fact that this movement of the coloured races against Europeans is a well organised one. It has vast stores of gold at its disposal. All the soldiers, serving today under the banners of European powers are members.

When one considers that the whites number one to two hundred blacks, the danger is obvious.

### Conscious of Strength

The blacks know now that their weakness has lain in a lack of cohesion which the whites, through superior knowledge and clever colonizing methods, took advantage of. But at the present time they are conscious of their strength. They have united under the leadership of Islam focussed in the semi-independent negro states of Abyssinia, Egypt, and Liberia. Dissatisfaction and hatred for the white immigrant are fermenting in all European colonies, even in the least significant African tribe.

Nevertheless there is an insurmountable obstacle to the unification of the conspiring group: the impossibility of immediate mutual understanding among the blacks themselves. All attempts to organise general conferences were suppressed by the colonial governments. Ras Tafari, regent of Abyssinia, who later ascended the throne and is now known as Haile Sellassie, started the ball rolling by allying with Egypt and Liberia in order to facilitate cooperation. The act encouraged unity and expanded the power of the negro union. The Negus (the head of the Negro Races) proposed a Pan-Negro Congress in Europe, to forge plans to check the growing influx of Europeans into Africa, and eventually to drive them out of these parts. The Congress was supposed to be for the discussion of social problems. European governments, however, guessed its real nature.

The leaders and potentates of colourdom who were to be the delegates to the congress of 1930 had difficulty in securing a meeting place. The governments of Europe knew that the conference was in reality an assembly of the dangerous Nya-Binghi. Russia was the only country which welcomed the negro representatives.

### Widespread

Altogether there were 82 delegates from all countries of the world. Aside from Abyssinia, Egypt and Liberia there were representatives from Nigeria, Sudan, Algeria, Tunis,



Morocco, the Azores, Madeira, Tripoli, and the former German colonies especially Togo and Kameroun. 190,000,000 blacks were thus represented. The Congress lasted 14 days. Its deliberations and decisions were kept strictly secret. At its close the leader of this giant Pan-negro organization was announced. The negro, Haile Sellassie was unanimously voted supreme powers in the Nya-Binghi. He accepted the position and swore to make war on the Europeans.

Quoting his own words at the time: "Death to the oppressors of the black races."

The Ku-Klux-Klan, the American Secret organization whose activities are directed against the blacks, was the first to become aware of the power of the Nya-Binghi. Clan leaders in numerous American cities, such as New York and Washington, were smitten with a strange disease. The illness was fatal. They could not determine its mysterious nature. One day Sam O. Wiking, the Assistant Chief of the Ku-Klux-Klan, was found dead in his room at No. 720 on the 26th floor of the Birmingham Hotel. The news spread. Members of the clan fled the country! The Ku-Klux-Klan was beaten! Black hands had poisoned its members! The rest of them would be marked by the Nya-Binghi!

At the Moscow Congress in 1930 the Negus realised that the first step in ridding Africa of Europeans was to get an outlet to the sea. Now Abyssinia is the only negro kingdom which presents any military significance. But to carry out his plan, the Negus needed soldiers and a basis of operation. Haile Sellassie early recognized the need for a complete reorganisation of his administration and of his army. Since his own subjects were incapable of undertaking this work, he hired Swedish, Belgian, Swiss and Dutch experts. It is ironical that white Europeans should be assisting the blacks, in their concerted efforts against the Europeans.

As stated before, Abyssinia is fighting for an outlet to the Red Sea. Upon accomplishing this, the rebellion of the blacks against the European powers with colonies in Africa is inevitable. An Abyssinian war against Italy attended by possible victory for the Abyssinians, would lead to a revolt of the blacks against the white. In such an event, it is more than doubtful whether Europe would have the strength to pit against such a black avalanche.

In the organization of the Nya-Binghi, Haile Sellassie first of all dispatched people to organize the negroes whose countries are annexed or which are under a protectorate, and to get them to recognize Haile Sellassie as their Ruler by Divine Right. They were to weld the various classes into groups. These groups then, were detailed to carry out





various duties, such as the provision of food and water during a war. In this department, the weaker of the women and the children were to be recruited. The stronger of the women were to undergo rigid military training, and to see that the warriors are supplied with arms and munitions. The old and decrepit were to look after the children. Everything else was up to the warriors.

### European Methods

Nor have the emissaries of the Nya-Binghi been slow to adopt European Methods. They employ agents and provocateurs (agitators) to stir up the blacks against the whites. The various uprisings in the Sudan and French Morocco point to the activities of the Nya-Binghi. The same thing is going on throughout the colonies.

One of the most important items of the Nya-Binghi programme is to win over the colonial troops, so that at a moment's notice, they will turn on their white officers. Indeed, it would be easy to carry this out in view of the paucity of European soldiery. And they are succeeding. The lesser revolts among the English, Spanish, French and Italian colonial troops are proof of the activity of the Nya-Binghi whose adherents or friends now number 190,000,000 blacks.

Should this black avalanche drag into its train the Yellow races, it would sound the alarm for India and all the other coloured peoples. True, these million of blacks are not skilled in war. But, primitive people mature young. At fourteen they are fit for service and the women think nothing of doing the work of men.

On the other hand, the leaders of the Nya-Binghi are highly educated men. They have studied at European and American high schools and attended military academies. The most exacting instructions are issued to them from the central department, situated in Addis Ababa.

The head of the Nya-Binghi is the Negus, Haile Sellassie. Next to him is Ras Cassa Sebalit, the ambitious general of the Abyssinian troops. His righthand man is Deggiac Beiene Mered, while the brains of the espionage department is Deggiac Aialen. Ras Cassa and Deggiac Aialen have sent ambassadors to Japan on business for the Negus. They set out on the fourth of August with a Japanese alliance as their undoubted objective. The Negus's programme is worked out to the most minute detail, and in the utmost secrecy.

Haile Sellassie is regarded as a veritable Messiah, a saviour of the coloured people, the Emperor of the Negro Kingdom. Wherever one mentions the word "Negus" the eyes of the black gleam with a mad fanaticism. They worship him as





an idol. He is their God. To die for the Negus is to ensure admission to paradise. Bloody sacrifices are offered up to him. The Negus who himself subscribes to European customs, has tried to stamp out such demonstrations but his ambassadors have worked so excellently that he dare not call a halt.

Army of 20,000,000

In carrying out their plans, they plan to starve out the whites, and then destroy them with arms. But above all, though, Abyssinia must have a harbour on the Red Sea, so she has set her heart on winning Somaliland. A high official of the Nya-Binghi, R.W. Cann, Finance Controller, said recently to a black merchant he was approaching for a contribution to the war fund, "The Nya-Binghi must have the means to maintain an army of 20,000,000 men and to finance a ten-year war."

The Nya-Binghi espionage net-work spreads over the whole world. It functions according to modern principles. The president is the well known Congo Negro Sami Amora.

Their agents have carried out other quite important business: the provision of arms and munitions, sometimes openly, sometimes smuggling them in secretly. Chemical and pharmaceutical preparations have been provided, and technical staffs have been formed, especially in American cities like Washington, St. Louis, Philadelphia and Chicago. Aeroplanes, autos and even railways are arranged for and - the whites are supplying the weapons which are bound to lead to their own destruction! -"

By Frederico Philos

Reprinted from Magazine Digest by Jamaica Times  
December 7, 1935, pp. 22-23.



APPENDIX III<sup>\*</sup>

ETHIOPIAN WORLD FEDERATION, Inc.

151 Lenox Avenue  
New York 27, N.Y.

September 24, 1955

Executive Committee  
Local #31  
Ethiopian World Federation, Inc.  
71 North Street,  
Kingston, Jamaica, B.W.I.

Dear Mr. President, Members of the Executive Committee

Greetings:

I was instructed by the Executive Council to forward to you, for your guidance, the following information relative to the Land Grant in Ethiopia.

1. Five hundred acres of very fertile and rich land has been given, through the Ethiopian World Federation, Inc., to the Black People of the West, who aided Ethiopia during her period of distress.
2. This land is the personal property of H.I. Majesty Emperor Haile Sellassie I. The land is given on a trial basis, the way it is utilised will be the touchstone for additional grants.
3. At present the Ethiopian Government is not prepared for mass migration, for this reason the people who are willing and able to go there to settle on the land must be of the pioneer calibre, they must be prepared to forego many of the things to which they are now accustomed.
4. These people must go in groups and have the co-operative spirit of - all for one and one for all - operating in this manner they can be no failure; this is said because of our experience with several members who are now in Ethiopia trying to develop the land but

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<sup>\*</sup> Reprinted from Michael Smith, Roy Augier and Rex Nettleford, The Ras Tafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica (Mona: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University College of the West Indies, 1960), pp. 39-40.



operating on an individual basis, which is not to the satisfaction of all concerned, however as additional members go we urge a change in this individual method.

5. Carpenters, plumbers, masons, electricians and other skilled persons should be among these groups, to prepare places for the people to live. People who are going to settle on the land should have a knowledge of farming, Doctors, Teachers, nurses and other professional people should look into the possibilities of going to Ethiopia to help in the public health and education of our brothers and sisters there and in turn learn from them many things which we need to know.
6. Since the Ethiopian World Federation, Inc., at the present time are not in a position to assume the financial burden of members who are desirous of going to Ethiopia to settle on the Land Grant, we urge that the local start a fund-raising campaign for the purpose of aiding those members who meet the qualifications required.

Be assured that in the very near future a more positive program for the Land project will be in motion.

Fraternally yours,

George A. Bryan  
Executive Secretary  
Robert L. Johnson  
International President  
Maymie Richardson  
International Organizer  
Ethiopian World Federation, Inc.







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